KATE GREENAWAY · PHIL MAY

LITTLEDOM CASTLE AND OTHER TALES

ILLUSTRATED BY JESSIE KING · C. WILHELM

ROSIE PITMAN · ARTHUR RACKHAM · H. RONNER

BY MRS M. H. SPIELMANN

HUGH THOMSON · H. FURNISS

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THE RAINBOW PALACE BY HUGH THOMSON, R.I.

"The gnome and the white pony saw the king riding towards them at the head of his brilliant train."

LITTLEDOM CASTLE
AND OTHER TALES

BY

MRS. M. H. SPIELMANN

With a Preface by M. H. Spielmann

ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR RACKHAM, A.R.W.S., KATE GREENAWAY, R.I., HUGH THOMSON, R.I., HARRY FURNISS, C. WILHELM, MADAME RONNER, R.I., ROSIE PITMAN, JESSIE M. KING, AND PHIL MAY, R.I.

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TO
LADS AND LASSIES
BRIGHT AND LAUGHTER-LOVING
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
IN HAPPY RECOLLECTION OF MY SON'S
OWN DELIGHTFUL CHILDHOOD.

MABEL H. SPIELMANN.

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PREFACE

WHO really believes that good fairy stories are cared for only by the youngsters for whom they are more particularly written? Every one who loves fun and fancy and little people, every heart remaining fresh and young and healthy, rejoices in the graceful telling and in the pure comedy of the fairy-tale. It is the test of excellence in writer and in reader. The delicious world that is not ours—or rather that is everybody's, in imagination—where wonders seem to be no longer wonderful even as we marvel at them, yet where we hold our breath at the amazing adventure till to our relief fairy-power puts all things right, and where we laugh at the strange inhabitants, their quaint and humorous ways and their comic talk—that world of dainty fancies which we first explored in our tender youth and which holds our love for ever, appeals unfailingly to every

bright and kindly nature. Whether the story be "truth severe by fairy fiction drest," or whether it ignore in happy recklessness the sober behests of statutory law, it refreshes and delights us all, men and women and children too—from Cape North to Cape Town, and from Pekin to Peru.

I ought not to say, I suppose (whatever I may think) that "Littledom Castle" and the "other tales" are *good* stories; for they are written by my wife. But among those who have judged of them are the artists—all famous artists—whose illustrations may be cited as proofs of their good opinion of what they have been pleased to consider as worthy for the exercise of their own delightful talent. Artists are the greatest child-lovers, and therefore the heartiest fairy-lovers—or they could not be artists; and *they* know when a story is not pretty only, not only frolicsome or poetic, but tender, comic, or dainty. And when they say all this about the different stories in this volume, I see no need to contradict them, even though I *am* related to the little authoress, by marriage.

Look, for example, at the illustrations to "Littledom

Castle," by Mr. Arthur Rackham (of the Royal Water-colour Society), and see how he has relished the mock seriousness and the burlesque fun of the tale—a tale which shows how ogres and dragons are often shamelessly maligned. Look at Mr. Wilhelm's beautiful picturing of "His Majesty of the Sun," and see how with his firm but dainty pen he revels in the opportunities for showing us the most beautiful and most elegant sprites that ever were seen or imagined by any fairy story-teller who ever chuckled, as she wrote, at her own merry fancies. In "Violet and the Doll-fairy," on the other hand, he dwells on the pretty absurdity of the dolls come half to life, yet remaining dolls all the while, and realizes for us the best traditions, for gallantry and splendour, of the natives of Lowther Arcade, now gone, alas, for ever. And then see in the two graceful little figures in "Ronald's Clock," how our dear Kate Greenaway showed her sympathy with childhood, in whose service she passed her life—they were among the last drawings she ever made.

"The Witch and the Jewelled Eggs" has afforded Mr. Hugh Thomson, R.I., material for unusual fancy

and sprightliness. The character in the faces of his personages, the mock-tragedy which turns to real comedy, the cunning of the Witch, and the joy of the ending following the trouble of the enchantment, are all rendered with that certainty of effect which invariably distinguishes the work of the eminent artist. And what contrast could be greater than the drawing in which Mr. Phil May celebrated "A Regular Bouncer"? No one understood the young schoolboy or the yelling baby as he did, portraying remorselessly the ugliness of action while sympathizing entirely with its motive and with every form of childish trouble. And how complete is the nursery in the background, with its funny alphabetical pictures all drawn with that wonderful firmness of line, hard yet flexible, which has made his name celebrated in every country where the art of the draughtsman is understood and appreciated.

Turn another page, and presto!—as with slap of Harlequin's staff, you see the drawings of Miss Rosie Pitman, work of a very different sort. There is a weird beauty of imagination and an earnestness of draughtsmanship, which harmonize curiously with

the elfish sentiment of a story that seems to have been distilled from the spray of the North Sea—the wind-borne spray that moistened the face of the writer as she "thought it out." The little Princess Reta and the Old Woman of the Sea are, I think, exercises in pure art on an elevated plane, not unworthy of this illustrator of *Undine*.

The cats and kittens of Madame Ronner are world-famous, too, for she not only knows the form and the habits of the feline race, but she is familiar with "kittenly nature down to the most appalling depths thereof," and she acted as a kind old friend in making the drawings for "Snowdrop's Tale." Doubtless, she is not so practised with the pen as with the brush, but the drawings of the great St. Bernard and of the aristocratic cats reveal to all who can appreciate animal character the ability of the artist and her enjoyment of the gladly-accepted task.

And then the ingenious pencil of Mr. Harry Furniss (who, you will remember, was one of the clever illustrators of Lewis Carroll) has romped with the friendly Tiger through the adventures of "Muriel" in the Fire-King's blazing realm, as it has romped

through many a fairy-story before and sported through the pages of *Punch*.

And, finally, Miss Jessie King, practising her own dainty art which has of late awakened so much interest and admiration, with quaintly original grace, has given us an example of her pen-embroidery (for it is nothing less) in her pretty realization of the Magic Garret.

So each artist has brought the charm of his method and treatment (or of hers) to the illustration of this little book, in variety as great as that of the stories themselves.

Most of these tales have already received the approval of the readers of *Little Folks*, and it is hoped that in their present form, lying snugly between the covers of a dainty volume—Mr. Paul Woodroffe's covers—they will please an audience larger and more friendly still.

Mister M. H. Spielmann.

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FOLKESTONE

Part I

NCE upon a time—not more than once—a billion years ago about three o'clock one Thursday afternoon, there lived an Ogre, a Dragon, and a Bogie. I say about three o'clock, because it is impossible to fix the exact time, as there were no clocks then. They dwelt in a beautiful place called Littledom, and their home was Littledom Castle.

The Ogre, Oscar by name, was a sleek kind man, and something of a poor stupid. He was a vegetarian, as he couldn't bear the idea of killing things for food.

As a rule, ordinary people are not so squeamish ; nor was his ancestor. His ancestor was a greedy old gentleman, who thought of nothing but his food, and was not at all particular as to how he got it, nor what form it took. He had been brought up badly, and knew no better. His descendant—*our* Ogre—believed he ate people only because it had spared him from killing the pretty lambs and birds, and the gentle cows. For example : when once he (the ancestor) was besieged in the castle by a regiment of soldiers, he simply looked upon their camp as his larder, and had eaten them all up by the end of the week ; even then he had sighed, as he murmured wearily, "*Toujours soldat !*"

Oscar had never possessed more than the one tooth with which he was born, but it was quite enough to eat vegetables with. Nuts he could crack on his head.

His housekeeper was a motherly old creature, and was beloved by the whole household when she was able to have her own way in everything. But when

" He murmured wearily, ' *Toujours soldat !* ' "

anything crossed her she was just a little bit —Well, well! But that is no reason why the female head of an establishment who is firm should nowadays be termed a dragon, as though it were an insult. However, she was a delightful Dragon—answering to the name of Dorothy—though she did sometimes waste time fancying herself an invalid.

Their friend the Bogie had been misunderstood in his day. In people's imagination only was he ugly, weird, or ungainly. His dark face was really very handsome, and his heart bubbled over with the milk of human kindness. Who can be ugly who is good and kind? The reason why he had such a dark complexion was simply that all the earlier members of his race had conceived a peculiar dislike to soap and water; that was the only reason he had for growing up black. This scientific fact Bertie had grasped, and took immense pride in his personal appearance, and was consequently a pleasure to look upon.

But no one ever saw him out of Littledom Castle, for Bigdom—that is to say, the whole world—had

turned its back upon him. So Bertie, as the Bogie was called, who would not have startled a gazelle, and who loved every one, big and little, had to keep away and live in enforced retirement, all because the black reputation of his ancestors was kept up by nurses saying, "The Bogie will come!" in tones that were a distinct imputation. His feelings were naturally hurt, and it made him very miserable.

The sweet-tempered Bogie appeared to nervous people with the sole intention of comforting them, and to those who were lonely in order to rouse them and keep them company. At the same time, being of a shy disposition, his only wish now was to escape notice and leave the world alone, under the impression that the world would then leave him alone, and not keep on writing about him in Christmas books, and in the reports of the Psychical Research Society.

As it happened, however, Bigdom had fixed its eye upon the three friends at Littledom Castle, and a very malevolent eye it happened to be.

Now, it will hardly be believed that Oscar, Dorothy, and Bertie were not only feared but hated throughout the length and breadth of Bigdom; which was the more unreasonable as none of the three had ever been absolutely known to set foot out of Littledom. Indeed, there was so much excitement about them that at a secret conclave held in Bigdom by professors and editors and things, it was Resolved:—

"THAT, considering the remarkable disappearance of several inhabitants who were known to have journeyed in the neighbourhood of Littledom and never been heard of again, decisive action should be taken to put a stop to such goings off. It was consequently ordained that there must be killed—

"1. The fearful Dragon who, it was whispered, guarded the Castle and destroyed every one who came within reach;

"2. The terrible Ogre, one of a race whose carnivorous appetite and wicked deeds they had read about in books;

"3. And the demon Bogie, whose name alone was

a terror, and whose dark life was a black and fearsome mystery."

None of the Secret Committee volunteered to do the knightly deed, though each appeared willing that his neighbour should claim the post of honour. There was an awkward pause and a little coughing. At last one of them made himself the hero of the hour by recommending a friend of his, assuring his fellow-members that it only required a hint from him for his friend to volunteer his services. The announcement was well received, and an invitation was issued to the friend, in which his attendance was politely requested. He was a knight, and attended in full armour; and when he heard that to him had fallen the honour of becoming champion of the world by ridding it of the three dreaded monsters, he rose and bowed his acknowledgments.

He was right glad to go, for he was the boldest knight that ever trod, or rode, or jousted. Heart-whole was he, too; so no pale lovesick maiden was there to bind her broidered kerchief around

"He was a Knight, and attended in full armour."

his casque, and faint when he should be lost to view.

"Good luck to you! And don't marry all the lovely damsels you may rescue!" shouted the people after him.

"Never fear!" he replied, unconsciously quoting his motto. He waved his spear in token of farewell, and, plunging his spurs up to the rowels into his horse's flanks, he trotted away.

Thus the Knight, armed cap-à-pie, went forth on his lonely quest, whilst his heart throbbed with valour and pride.

For many days he journeyed with no further experiences than punctual hunger, and an oft-recurring thirst; but, these satisfied, he found change of air scarcely less invigorating. At last he came to Littledom, and the next day entered the forest which surrounded Littledom Castle.

It was a bright May morning, when all nature was joyous; birds twittered gaily in the trees, and gladsome was the heart of the warrior. Success, he felt

sure, awaited him, and laurels would be plucked for him in Bigdom, and in the gratitude of great peoples his fame would be enshrined. He laughed aloud at the thought of it, and with words of encouragement spurred on his trusty steed. Then did he bethink him—

"I am nearing the scene of action without an adventure. Beshrew me," he reflected, "there surely must be hereabouts some lovely damsel in need of rescue!"

At that moment he heard sounds of wailing. He drew rein and listened.

"By my halidome," cried he, "a lady in distress!" And the gallant knight pushed eagerly forward.

Following the sobs and sighs, he came to an open glade, and there, sitting in the very middle of it, was a young woman rocking her body to and fro, moaning, and wringing her hands in despair; while her long, dark hair hung limp in a disordered mass over her face.

The Knight approached, and said gently—

"Lady, weep not so."

"I have lost my way," quoth she; "Littledom Castle must be nigh. The three dreadful monsters may appear at any moment." And she shuddered at the thought.

"Let them come!" he shouted as one inspired.

"Hush! Their cruelty is reputed terrible. Alas! bright sir, our doom is sealed."

"Fear not, sweet lady. Where there is a knight there is hope. Stay you here whilst I go on and single-handed engage them. Then will I return to you."

"No, no!" she screamed. "Leave me not, or I shall never see you more."

"Courage, fair one. I fear not failure. Lift, I pray you, your sweet face to mine so that I may gaze upon it, that the memory of its beauty and its helplessness may warm my blood and strengthen my arm."

Blushing, the maiden put back her locks and looked up shyly with tear-stained eyes.

"Humph!" muttered the Knight. He turned on his horse's four hoofs and hurried to business.

Whereupon she set to and wept afresh. "Ah me!" came wafted on the sweet breeze.

"That's all very well," thought the Knight, "when *I* have to do all the work and take all the risk—like an author who is his own publisher to boot!"

He came now to a long avenue at the end of which appeared bright flowers and fruit trees; behind rose a long, turreted castle, at sight of which the Knight brandished his spear aloft. "Never fear!" he exclaimed with the ardour of valour as he galloped forward. But he sped only a few yards, for his horse suddenly stood still, and then backed. And the rider was not less amazed at what he saw, so that he stared open-mouthed at the scene.

Below him—on a sofa under a tree—lay the Dragon. A dish of blue fire was in her lap, and she was snapping raisins from it, which she ate with great relish.

The Knight, recovering himself, pricked his spurs into his horse and shouted: "To mortal combat! Monster! You must die!" But the horse wouldn't budge.

"Moaning, and wringing her hands in despair."

Dorothy looked up. "*Please* don't shout," she said languidly. "I'm not strong." She tucked in her tail more comfortably, and gave an irritable flutter with her enormous wings, which glinted and sparkled in the sunlight.

Checked in his onslaught, the Knight stared at her more astonished than ever.

"Visitors so frequently arrive like that," she added; "riding roughshod over our double geraniums. Get down, sir, and come and play at snap—it's raisin brandy, of my own raisin';" and she sniggered.

Could he slay thus this gentle creature as she sported with the fruit? No. So he dismounted, tied his trembling steed to a tree, and then slowly advanced, his heart thumping with excitement, while he clutched his sword ready for combat.

Part II

SEEING this, Dorothy smiled at him broadly, then opened wide her mouth and laughed outright. He felt uncomfortable. She became serious again, and then he noticed a cold gleam of disapproval in her eye, which made him still more wary lest he should be taken off his guard.

"Really!" she remarked, motioning him to be seated, "people are somewhat discourteous nowadays methinks. It was only last Monday, whilst the three of us were taking tea on the Terrace, that we saw a strange man in the garden, running about, hiding and peering at us from behind our trees. We caught him, more dead than alive. We thought he was a burglar; but he turned out to be only a poor poet from Bigdom. We really pitied him."

"Does he still live?" exclaimed the Knight, starting to his feet.

"You shall judge for yourself presently," replied the Dragon, with a sniff.

A bell rang loudly. "Dinner!" said the Dragon "Will you follow me?" And she strolled indoors.

"Now or never," muttered the Knight, as he followed slowly; "but I certainly ought to have slain the Dragon first. Yet how could I? It seems very odd, somehow." And absentmindedly he scratched his casque.

She led him into a vast hall, in which about fifty ladies and gentlemen sat dining at a round table, presided over by a huge man with a mild face and one tooth.

At sight of the Knight, the company bowed.

"Welcome!" said the Ogre's stentorian voice.

"Manners!" whispered Dorothy in the Knight's ear. Confused, he only murmured, "Who are all these?"

"Our house party. Don't be such a churl. Bow to them."

"Your victims!" hissed the Knight between his

clenched teeth. Then, yelling "Die, villain! Monster! Assassin!" he hurled himself at the Ogre. But those near surrounded their host as a bodyguard.

And then a roar of laughter resounded throughout the great hall, and echoed and re-echoed throughout the castle.

"Intolerable!" ejaculated the dainty Dragon, as she swept off in stately fashion to her duties outside.

"'No ceremony!' is our motto here," said Oscar, turning courteously to the Knight, who, with some difficulty, had been calmed down and sank breathless into the place of honour accorded to him. "So act up to it, I pray you; your soup is getting cold." Whereupon the interrupted discussion upon "Charities, and how to make them self-supporting," proceeded with animation. All the ladies and gentlemen were in the best of spirits, and the fare exhaled a most fragrant odour of freshly gathered herbs.

But the Knight continued wary, and would touch nothing, in spite of his other neighbour's assurances that he need have no qualms—his apologies could

"He hurled himself at the Ogre."

wait until later on—for, he added, they had all on arrival been guilty of much the same rudeness. It was only last Monday that he himself had looked in, after losing his way, and at sight of the dreaded trio drinking tea had fallen ill with fright. But he had been so carefully nursed, so kindly treated, that he had never spent such an enjoyable visit in his life. "And the hospitality! Why, some of the guests had been there for years, and were made so welcome," continued the neighbour, with a glowing face, "they even fell in love with the damsels they had meant only to rescue, and been married in the temple fitted up for the purpose within the very castle walls."

The Knight eyed him more and more suspiciously.

"And, of course, Sir Knight, being a Bigdom man, I recognized your shield at once when you entered, although you wouldn't know me, though you must know my poems, for I presume you take in *Poetic Chips?* No? You surprise me. May I inquire how it is you come to be here?"

The Knight considered a moment, and then in low tones he explained his quest.

"All idle rumours," answered the Poet. "Every one is welcome here for as long as he or she chooses to remain; open house, liberty hall; and no one yet who ever entered has ever cared to leave."

"Not suffered to, you mean," retorted the Knight darkly. "But," and he lowered his voice still more, "I don't believe in it. I intend to kill the three of them, and set you all free. Never fear!"

"Never fear! That's quite right," exclaimed Oscar kindly, having just caught the last words.

The dinner was arranged on vegetarian principles.

"Marrow, sir?" said the butler to the Ogre, after having made the round of the table with a huge dish of it. At the question the Ogre's smile faded. He raised both hands in horror, and, averting his head, remarked—

"*What!* How very forgetful of the dear Dragon!"

"Vegetable marrow, sir?"

"No, Charles, no. Of course not. Oh, that word!

It suggests meat. Now I can't fancy anything." And he pushed his plate away.

But, talking to the Knight, he quickly forgot the matter, and was soon deep in praise of his housekeeper, and eating heartily of stuffed tomatoes.

"Such a dear creature, she is—the dear Dragon—quite invaluable! Dyspepsia is my family complaint, you know, and would have killed me long ago but for her care. Our house party keeps growing," the Ogre rambled on, "but nothing is really too much for her to do so long as she doesn't think of her heart. But when she lets herself go, and pities people too much, of course then she becomes useless, the gentle creature."

"Ha!" muttered the Knight, edging further off.

"She imagines she is delicate, but bless you, she's all right, and always looks splendid—at times, with the servants, perhaps just a leetle bit—— However, so long as one is happy—but, Sir Knight, you're eating nothing."

"Lies and nonsense!" said the Knight to himself.

"I'm not hungry," he added aloud, and sat moody and silent, without, however, lack of food for thought and vengeance.

The repast over, Oscar and Dorothy kindly offered to show the Knight over their domain.

He changed colour, and accepted rather awkwardly.

It was a magnificent place, as comfortable in its arrangement as it was refined in decoration. Nevertheless, it was somehow so strange that he couldn't believe that all was straightforward and as it appeared to be.

They were entering a small and rather gloomy chamber, when suddenly a dark figure darted out of it, and, in a gush of cold air, scurried away down the passage like a ghost, startling the Knight so that he dropped his sword.

"That was Bertie!" exclaimed the Ogre apologetically.

"Who's Bertie?" inquired the Knight.

"Not know dear old Bertie?" said the Ogre surprised. "His surname's Bogie."

"He dropped his sword."

"What! Where?" shouted the Knight, and the next second he had picked up his weapon and was racing madly after the retreating figure, yelling, "Hideous monster! Foul Fiend! Die you shall! You shall be the first!"

Pursued and pursuer flew up and down, turn about, round this corner, round that, up stairs steeper and steeper, till at last the Knight ran his quarry into a corner of a top attic.

Then Bogie turned and gazed sorrowfully at him, and the point of the Knight's sword fell down slowly to his side as he looked upon the kind face of the handsome shadow.

"Surely," he stammered, "you—you are not Bogie, the terror that frightens every one!"

"So people say," replied poor Bogie, in his soft, gentle voice. "And, as bad luck would have it, I even startled you. That is why I fled. I'm so very sorry. It makes me so nervous when I see frightened faces. I missed the pleasure of an introduction at dinner," he continued timidly, "because I had gone

out to carry some toys to a birthday child on the estate —a great friend of mine. But pray let me now be your guide, and show you to your room."

Arrived there, they found the Ogre and the Dragon quietly choosing some lovely embroidered robes for their new guest, and seeing to his every comfort.

And now, at last, the scales fell from the Knight's eyes, and he realized what kind, good creatures they were, and how cruelly they had been misjudged.

Actual tears filled the brave Knight's eyes as he realized that the dreadful accusations against them had never been founded upon fact, but were nothing more than pure inventions of a strong imagination. He apologized handsomely.

"I came to kill the three of you," he said; "I did, really; and you load me with kindnesses. But, somehow, as far as I know, it seems never to have entered anyone's head—least of all mine—that an Ogre, a Dragon, and a Bogie, could be such a charming party

"The point of the Knight's sword fell down slowly to his side."

as you are. Really, I don't know what excuses to make."

"Cheer up!" said the Ogre, patting him affectionately on the shoulder; "it's quite all right. We're used

"'Cheer up!' said the Ogre."

to it from new comers, aren't we?" And he turned to the Dragon and Bogie, who smilingly assented, and shook hands warmly with the Knight on his better understanding.

"But," added Oscar, "is there nothing more we can do to serve you, Sir Knight? We have been able to do so little."

"To be sure there is: I had forgotten. There's a damsel in the forest crying her eyes out. I—ha, ha! —really too absurd! I hardly know how to explain. I—er—actually promised to rescue her!"

They all laughed merrily.

"I guessed as much," exclaimed the Dragon drily. "They *will* get sitting about like that. Young women are so anxious to be rescued, dear, poetical little things! So I sent some of the ladies to comfort her and bring her here. But she wouldn't believe them, and refused to come. Perhaps you had better go to her yourself." And the Dragon winked a diplomatic wink.

So the Knight went to the wailing damsel—he didn't hurry—and told her all. And she came with him, and marvelled at the kindly welcome, and at all she heard, and at all she saw. The following day he noticed her wearing bright satins and bright eyes,

which no tearstains disfigured, and her raven locks were draped with pearls. She looked quite pretty, and so sweet that his heart went out to her, and she took it, and kept it, and treasured it next her own ; and a week later they were happily married in the temple within the castle walls.

So happy were they that they stayed there, and their friends never heard of either again, and gave them up for lost. Of course, Bigdom believed the same about them as it believed about all the others —that they had lost their way in the forest, and had been frightened by the Bogie, killed by the Dragon, and eaten up by the Ogre.

But the guests at Littledom Castle knew very much better. They kept their whereabouts secret, for they appreciated their good luck, and said, " We do not want other people to abuse our kind hosts' hospitality ; likewise, we don't want trippers."

Thus far, then, was it an enchanted spot : inasmuch as all who entered there found true sympathy and affection, without the unkind gossip and strife of Big-

dom. They had discovered, where they least expected it, a very haven of rest. So they gratefully clung to their happiness in peaceful Littledom Castle, away in the recesses of the mysterious forest.

UP THE GOLDEN STAIRWAY

IT was very hot one August afternoon as Sybil sat in a big chair under her favourite tree. Her stay in Persia, where her father had been on government service, was at an end, and she was so glad to be in dear old England again.

Sybil was eight years old, with fair hair, and eyes as blue as the sky above her. Just as she was thinking how she could best amuse herself, her little friend "Major Robinson" alighted with a flutter of his wings right in front of her, as though he had dropped

from the sky. This was a robin, a dilapidated little gentleman without a tail; with legs curiously deficient in calves, Sybil thought, as he hopped slowly in front of her, picking up the crumbs she threw to him from the tea-table.

They formed a pretty group in the old-fashioned sun-bathed garden. On one side stood the ancient sun-dial; on the other, the playing fountain, with goldfish swimming lazily in the basin below. Stately trees and bright flowers were round about, and there was a high row of officious-looking sunflowers, flaring and flaunting against the background of the hedge.

But the old garden was not looking its best; it seemed to be grinning against its will. It was burning in the sunshine, when it only wanted to drink. The ground was caked hard, and was thirsty—very thirsty and parched. The fuchsias drooped wearily. The roses looked down sadly from above their protecting guard of thorn-bayonets. Even the foxgloves wore a pale and haggard look. And the trees were quite still, waiting, patiently waiting, in the

great heat for the rain which would surely come, as it had always come before. But the fountain plashed on merrily enough to the drowsy droning of the bees at their work, and to the cheery song of a fluttering lark above.

"The Major" may have felt grateful, or he may not. At any rate, having finished his meal, off he flew. Which was disappointing.

But the butterflies kept Sybil company; and she followed them with her eyes as they flitted about, in their pretty, jerky flight.

"How merry you look!" she muttered. "How lively you are in the sun, but you never seem to know where you are going. Had I been like you, by this time I should have butterflown all over the garden, and shut up my wings on the top of a geranium."

As Sybil looked round, her eyes fell on a dancing sunbeam which had found its way through the branches of her tree and was slowly approaching closer and closer to her feet. Looking at it steadily up and down, all of a sudden she realized that it was

a moving stairway of gold, and what she had always taken for atoms of floating dust were really tiny dancing fairies—some in golden armour, and some in skirts of golden tissue; all of them tumbling up and down in the most comical confusion, and beckoning to her to join them.

She obeyed at once, smiling and happy at the hope of fun; and she was now in the midst of the little crew, who were chattering and singing as gaily as if they were so many birds.

"Who are all these?" asked Sybil of a little knight, who had taken her by the hand.

"We are Sun Sprites."

"What are you made of?" she ventured further.

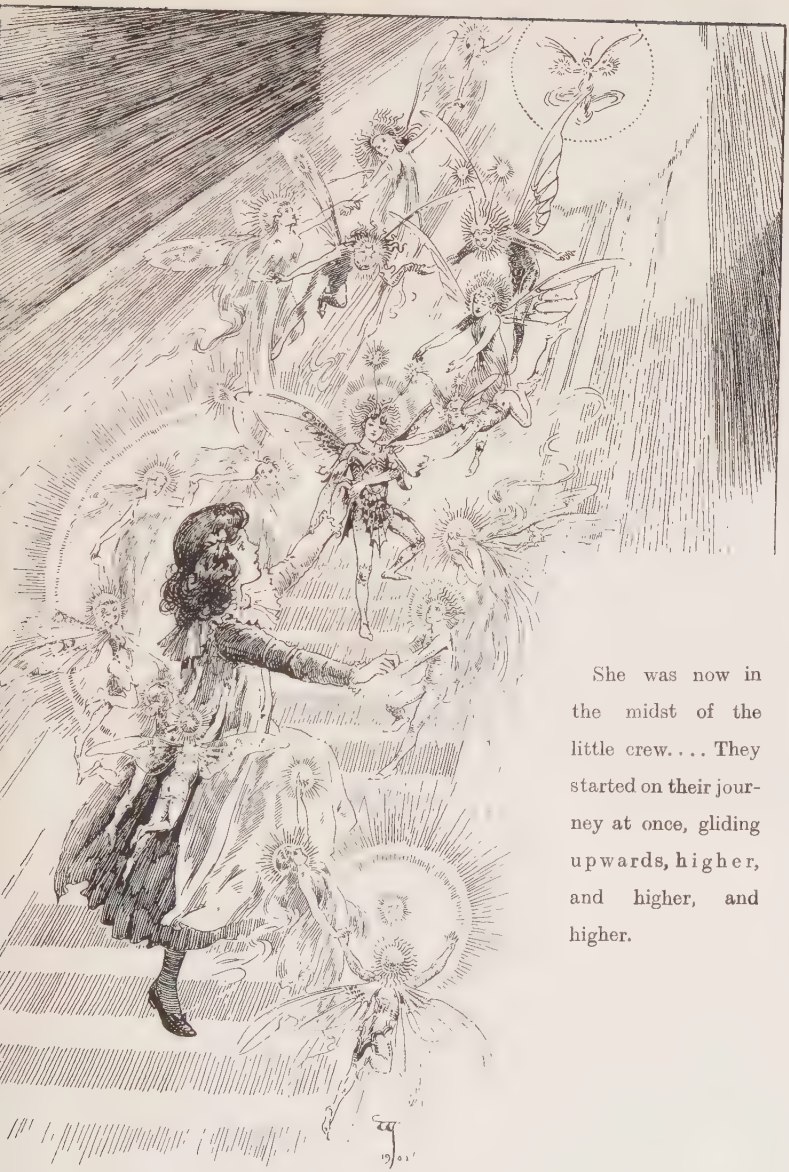
"Made of? Dust, of course. Atoms of dust; like you."

"I thought so!" returned Sybil triumphantly, and then added: "Will you tell me your name?"

"I'm called the Knight Light."

"Night-light?" she repeated. "Why?"

"Because I'm keeper of the Lighthouse. I'm the



She was now in the midst of the little crew. . . . They started on their journey at once, gliding upwards, higher, and higher, and higher.

Knight Light by day, and the Light Knight by night."

"Why?" repeated Sybil, surprised.

"Well, you see, my business is to turn and turn about, and that's how I do it. Are you going up?"

"I should like to; but I can't see where it leads to." She had to shade her eyes with her hand as she gazed aloft. "And it seems such a very long way to go alone."

"Oh, I'll conduct you, if you'll allow me," offered the gallant knight. "But I can't take you further than the gate. Will that do?"

"Yes, thank you," replied Sybil gratefully, because she thought it might; but she wasn't quite sure in her own mind that it would.

He was already leading her through the great crowd, on to the moving stairway; and they started on their journey at once, gliding upwards, higher, and higher, and higher.

There was so much hustling everywhere that the knight muttered at last, "What a muddle and pushing there is to be sure, this Sunday!"

"Monday, isn't it?" interrupted Sybil.

"Excuse me," he said with impatience. "Sunday is some day in some places, but it is Sunday every day in Sunland. Don't make any mistake about that."

Then he held her more tightly by the hand, saying, "There's still far for you and me to go," and they glided up higher and higher still.

As they neared the top of the stairway, Sybil saw in the distance an immense gate, which flashed red and yellow lights like the gems called sun-opals. And before she could realize it, she found herself standing on the top stair of all, with her hand, which had clasped that of her companion, now holding on to the gate. She looked round. He was nowhere to be seen; nor, indeed, was anybody, not even a single Sun Sprite, while behind her nothing of the stairway remained but one high step upon which she stood. In front, nothing was to be seen but a thick golden mist, like a yellow fog, and a bright and pleasant warmth glowed around her.

SYBIL was surprised and puzzled, and just a little frightened. She pushed against the gate, but it was so heavy she could hardly move it.

Then she saw a little sprite looking at her from over the other side of it. He was very much like the knight, she thought; and like every one else on the stairway.

"Do open it, please," begged Sybil; "I'm so tired of waiting here."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the reply.

"It isn't a joke," she remonstrated.

Sybil thought she would goad him into doing it with a trick. "I see," she said; "you couldn't open that heavy gate if you tried. My cousin Clive could if he were here, but then, of course, he's big and strong."

"He, he!" laughed the sprite, and disappeared in the mist beyond. At that moment the opal gate slowly swung itself wide open. Recovering from her surprise, Sybil ran quickly through; she passed through the mist, which opened like a curtain, and found herself in a vast landscape of waving golden corn, intersected with paths of golden dust, which, every now and then, the breeze lifted high into shimmering clouds. The whole was suffused in a flood of hot sunlight.

Everywhere about were sprites innumerable.

The little stranger had not proceeded far before a very queer fellow came strolling towards her. His lower half first attracted Sybil's attention; his legs were bandy, and he was clothed in rusty brown, from which spiders' webs hung in tatters. Above them was no anatomy to speak of, on top of which was a round head as flat as a pancake. The whole had the appearance of a dusty, rusty being of uncertain age, with a rolling, halting, rheumaticky walk, as if he were not used to move.

very queer fellow came strolling towards her. His lower half first attracted Sybil's
tion; his legs were bandy, and he was clothed in rusty brown, from which spiders'
hung in tatters."

He came nearer, when Sybil thought she recognized his dirty face for that of an old friend. It was Sun Dial, but a strange one, and a very untidy, uncouth fellow he looked.

"Good afternoon," said Sybil.

"The time of day to you," came the reply.

"What time's that, please?"

"Tea-time." Saying which, he passed on, his expression one shade more dismal than before.

"He's more polite than usual," remarked a sprite. "He never tells any one the time unless the Sun-King makes him. Look! His Majesty is coming along"—at which the sprites all formed up in double row.

There remained Sybil, and watched with delight the royal procession, which was marching slowly towards her.

First came trumpeters blowing loud blasts and long—a long-winded affair. Then a bevy of knights, amongst whom Sybil recognized her friend, who saluted her and winked as he went past. Behind

them, a crowd of sunny-faced maidens tripped, strewing shimmering sparks before a golden chariot, drawn by two golden bears—a great bear and a little one. In the gorgeous chariot, immovable and smiling, with shining eyes that never blinked, sat his Majesty the Sun-King. A splendid-looking personage he was; very fat, with arms crossed over his stoutness; very jovial, with a smile which never faded, yet was ever fresh; and very stately withal. He was clad in resplendent light array, and instead of wearing a crown on his head, he wore a golden corona round his smooth, beaming old face. In the rear, stately sprites marched in couples, carrying beautiful flowers such as sundew, sunroses, sundrops, sunspurge, sunhemp, and sunfern, and others too numerous to mention.

As the chariot went by, Sybil curtseyed low.

"Halt!" cried the Sun-King; and then said to Sybil in awesome yet genial tones—

"Little lady, I heard you had arrived in Sunland. The journey is always difficult, but I made it as easy as I could for you. Welcome! Come with me."

"As the chariot went by, Sybil curtseyed low."

Sybil, proud at such an honour, rose and entered the glistening chariot, and sat next to the King! Then the procession proceeded slowly on its way.

At last, thinking she ought to say something, Sybil remarked politely: "What beautiful weather we're having!"

"It's I who make it so," replied the Monarch.

"So good of you," said Sybil respectfully, as she had heard people say in drawing-rooms. Then she added, quite sincerely, "I hope your Majesty is well."

He appeared gratified at this.

"No, thanks very much," he replied, "I'm not quite the thing at present. It's about eleven years since I had the last bad attack of spots upon my face, and I feel another coming on. I generally have a few of them. And," he added confidentially, "I really think they are nothing more than heat spots. Yet they frequently puzzle the scientists. *They* say they are *cold*-spots; they do, indeed! Just fancy that now!"

And he laughed till it looked as if he *must* blink his

eyes, as every one who looked at them had to do. But he did not.

On kept the procession, still at a walking pace, through the bending corn and clouds of gold. And everywhere the sprites about formed themselves in a double row.

Grown comparatively serious again, the Monarch inquired with a gracious smile—

"And how are my well-beloved friends, your King and Queen in England?"

"Quite well, sire; thank you," said Sybil.

"Ah! I'm glad of that. I haven't seen them for a week. You see, London is rather out of my beat. I was expected at the garden-party the other day, and I tried hard to get there; but one thing and another detained me, so that my absence was unavoidable. They were good enough to think of postponing their fête for me, but, of course, I didn't desire that. I was so sorry to disappoint them, but it's often such a rush to be everywhere at once, especially during the season."

Sybil did not quite know what to reply. She felt so insignificant; and she could not think what the King and Queen would wish her to say under the circumstances. In fact, her new friend was the only royal personage she had ever spoken to; so she held her peace, and basked in the radiance of the Sun-King's smile.

After a long pause, during which he looked at her, he remarked: "I like you, little lady!"

"Thank you, sire," she replied shyly.

"Now, can you guess what I am going to give you?"

Sybil shook her head, saying she was sure she couldn't. For a moment his face clouded over—then brightened again.

"Come, come! Try. It begins with a 'T,'" he returned encouragingly.

"T?" she repeated.

"That's it. Yes; tea! Just fancy that now!" And his Majesty threw himself back and laughed. "You've guessed it right first time. And I'm going

to give you something with it. See if you can guess that too. Now, it begins with 'B. and B.' What do you think begins with 'B. and B'?"

"Bread and butter!" exclaimed Sybil merrily. "This *is* a funny game of play!"

"Right again, little lady! So it is!" answered his delighted Majesty with admiration. "Yes; and you are going to have them in your own palace."

"*My* palace!" exclaimed Sybil wondering.

"Your palace; my gift."

The Sun-King here stooped and kissed her lightly on both cheeks, foreign fashion, and she felt they were blushing rosy brown. She clasped her hands with delight and exclaimed—

"How can I thank your Majesty for this gift?"

"You can't! Just fancy that, now!" And he beamed all over his kind face. "See! Yonder is your palace. You will find tea awaiting you in the grounds—that's because it isn't coffee. The Knight Light has my orders."

The chariot stopped. Sybil alighted; then, hold-

ing out her frock in each hand, she dropped her prettiest curtsey. The genial Sun-King said, "A bright and warm farewell to you!" and, immovable once more, passed on.

SYBIL'S PALACE

SYBIL turned round, and she saw her palace directly, because, as it happened, it was there just in front of her. And such a palace!—glittering in the brightness as though it were made of light, for its turreted outline alone was distinguishable in the general dazzle and glare.

But as soon as she stepped across the threshold she could see how lovely it was, for the sunblinds were down. The Knight Light was there, and bade her "Welcome in the King's name," which she acknowledged with a dignified bow. No one else was about. Sybil marvelled at the wonderful halls, the furniture, and the general magnificence, the like of which she thought she never could have imagined. Through a vast terrace, the Knight led the way into a lovely garden where, placed on a carpet of butter-

cups, was a table laid with cloth of gold, upon which tea was already prepared. The service was golden; so was the syrup. Even the eatables were of the same colour—the yellow bread and butter, and the gilt gingerbread, while the brown sugar glistened gold.

During the meal, Sybil glanced around, and saw close by at her right-hand Sun-Dial, with his queer legs crossed, standing like a statue, his flat face turned rigidly in the direction of the sun, as though he had a stiff neck. On her left was a fountain, from which fireworks rose continuously, like water-jets. A sun-bird, with its brilliant plumage, flew amongst the flowers, and sipped their fragrant juices. It had no tail, and reminded Sybil of her friend "The Major."

Justice was not done to the little meal. Sybil was too excited to be hungry, and she was anxious to hear more about her friend the Sun-King, and Knight Light was there to entertain her.

So he told her how his Majesty of the Sun had no equal in power, and dated from such ancient times that after counting back and back until one

lost count altogether, then thousands and thousands of years more had to be added before even a remote idea of his age could be imagined. How busy he had to be to keep up with the business always expected of him; it being as much as he could do sometimes to visit those who are ill and who go long journeys over sea and land in the hope of an interview with the Sun-King. Many were the sun-portraits taken of him by his eager admirers—but none ever did him justice. The knight told how none could equal his Majesty's bright disposition, from the time he rises—always punctually according to the almanacs; and how sometimes for hours together he would become fierce to a degree. Unfortunately, every day towards bedtime he would grow morose, get red in the face, and set himself in a temper, gloriously handsome in spite of everything. This was the time he had to take his evening dip, to be followed by the afterbath. And, refreshed, the Sun-King would rise again next day.

Sybil listened, enchanted, and the knight went on:

Otherwise, he is never seen "down" or dejected, for if he felt at all out of humour—as he sometimes did with various countries, or with discontented, selfish people—he would draw a dark cloud-curtain before him, and hide himself until everybody was sorry, and he thought fit to reappear.

There were even people who brought their reverence for the Sun-King to such a pitch that they worshipped him as a god. On them he smiled with merry good-humour.

"In health he is always the same," continued the knight, "though some believe he is stronger at times than at others. He is so artistic, too," added the Sun Sprite enthusiastically, "his Majesty revels in fine colouring, and loves to surround himself with such magnificent effects and arrangements of colour that artists have never been able to vie with his talent, and have had to be content to remain mere copyists and disciples. I forgot to tell you that he is also responsible for the harvests all over the world, which take up a lot of his time every

summer, and that work often becomes too arduous —farmers are difficult people to please—for whenever it happens he is not there to superintend, something bad is sure to occur, and then he gets all the blame. They seldom forget to blame—how different with their praise and gratitude!" Here the knight shook his head so solemnly, that, to change the subject, Sybil inquired: "Does he read much?"

"I should think he did; why, he reads all the Sunday papers every morning."

She looked perplexed, and there was an awkward pause.

"I suppose you know," he resumed, "that people's lives are assured at an Office that bears his name, out of compliment to his longevity?"

Sybil didn't quite understand this, either; but before she could question him further he proposed she should visit the wonderful Light House. She had noticed it close by, and had longed to go inside, and was all the more impressed and delighted when the knight explained, as he led the way, that it was

by the King's favour she was admitted, for no one went in there. "A very great honour indeed!" wound up her companion; and he sighed. "Even I can't go in, you know, although I'm the keeper, and it is ages since his Majesty went to see that the beams were working all right."

"How beautifully the sun shines everywhere about!" exclaimed Sybil rapturously.

"No wonder!" rejoined her companion, "when you are in luck. Now, here's the key!" The knight spoke in a hushed whisper, for they had arrived at the door of the Light House, which had a large lock in the middle. "Put it in and let go. You must be quick, or there may not be time to see everything." He was moving away, but came back to say: "Press the button on the golden door, which you will see later, walk through the curtain, and on the other side you will find me in waiting."

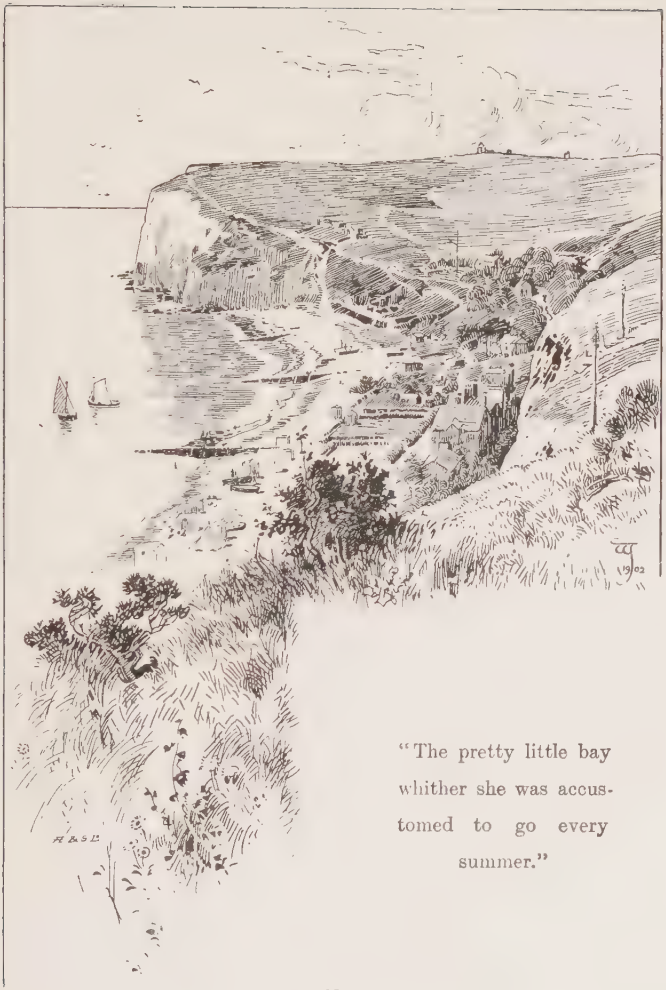
Sybil turned to ask him to repeat his directions, but he had disappeared.

Part II

WHAT HAPPENED THEN

TREMBLING with pleasure and excitement, Sybil put the key in the lock and let go. It opened to let her pass, then shut to behind her with a snap.

She looked round curiously, and found herself all alone in a vast circular chamber, light and airy, with windows at intervals all around, from each of which a ray of light beamed outwards. Approaching one of them, she was startled to find letters of fire springing out above it, and form themselves into the word "England." And as Sybil looked out she could actually see down, along a sunbeam of tumbling sprites, as through a telescope, right down to earth. She could see invalids enjoying the warmth; farmers gazing anxiously up aloft; animals basking lazily;



"The pretty little bay whither she was accustomed to go every summer."

and many other phases of everyday life. Beyond, distinctly visible, was a train puffing along towards a city. She recognized the houses it was passing. One of them—that one over there with the red roof and white gables—was her own home.

At the foot of the sunbeam she could see a boy running, and a woman hurrying after him holding his large straw hat in her hand. And immediately afterwards, Sybil heard a peculiar noise as of a trumpet call, and she saw a sun sprite detach itself by order, dart down the sunbeam, run up the boy's back, strike him on the head, and run down again. The obstinate little fellow clasped his hands on his forehead in evident pain, and fell to the ground.

"Sunstroke, of course!" murmured Sybil. "What a pity he wasn't obedient! But," she pondered, "I never knew it was possible to see from sun to earth."

Having moved ever so slightly to the left, but still at the same window, she saw the pretty little bay whither she was accustomed to go every summer to bathe. His Majesty the Sun was smiling sweetly on

the sea, which rippled back with fun, and a regular will o' the wisp dance was going on upon its surface ; and children were there bathing, paddling, laughing, and throwing the spray about, whilst people picked wild flowers on the cliff, and entered pretty villas where flags fluttered gaily in the front gardens.

So every part of the window disclosed a different view in the same country ; but Sybil feared to linger, as she was anxious for a peep through all the other windows. She moved, therefore, in high expectation to the next one. As she did so, letters above formed "France." Sybil stood and gazed down its sunbeam.

There was Paris with its handsome buildings and monuments and shops. Sybil noticed elegant ladies, beautifully dressed, driving in luxurious carriages and motor cars to the Bois de Boulogne where music played, and others, quite as elegant, chatted over refreshments with gentlemen who wore pointed moustaches and the politest of smiles.

Sybil waited no longer in her anxiety to see through the next window. It looked out on Japan—so said

"Down one of these paths a little Jap was running."

the letters of fire. On a mat in a room sparely furnished sat a beautiful little Japanese lady, playing a mandolin. Soon she lay down, her head, with its elaborate fantastic dressing, supported on a wooden rest, and drew a puff or two from a tiny pipe, which she removed from her little mouth, " tap, tapped " with it against a bronze tray, and closed her eyes in sleep.

Another peep to the right disclosed a Japanese garden, with its miniature old trees, tiny paths, and bridges. Down one of the paths a little Jap was running with a quaint kite, quite regardless of the jogging he was giving the babe slung on to his back.

She looked a little to the left—a great mountain was there, grand in its lonely height.

Bang!

In her hurry Sybil had knocked her elbow against the next pane of glass, and knocked a pain into her funny-bone. There was a shivering, rumbling noise, as of thunder, and she saw to her dismay a great crack across the fair face of the window, through which a dark cloud alone was visible!

BEHIND THE CLOUD

THE Sun-King's little visitor stood there trembling. What had she done? she asked herself. What had she better do? The thought kept on repeating itself in Sybil's mind and bewildered her. She glanced again through the riven window—still no letters of fire, only the same dark cloud. And, to add to the general gloom, all the other windows became shrouded in the dull black veil.

Sybil sat down on the floor and thought, and wondered, and fancied, and feared, until, more perplexed than ever, she looked upwards for inspiration. There, in the roof, was a golden door, and from it hung a beamlike ladder. Quick as thought her mind flew to the knight. He must help her. He must conduct her to the Sun-King; she would tell his Majesty what had happened, and take the consequences of her carelessness.

She felt a trifle happier now that she had come to this decision. Catching hold of the beam, she drew herself up to the door, and pressed the button. A curtain like a dark mist confronted her. She walked through it, and there, sure enough, standing in the semi-light, stood the knight saluting her.

"Are you ready to go down?" he asked, taking hold of her hand. "It will be rather difficult, as I can't see the way."

"No, I'm not ready," she replied, withdrawing her hand; "I want to see his Majesty of the Sun."

"You can't do that," answered the knight positively. "He's in one of his fierce moods. He's feeling very much upset, although it's not yet dipping time. He retired a moment ago—for how long it is uncertain—and he cannot be disturbed."

"But I *must* see him," argued Sybil, who felt very much afraid in the circumstances, though firm in her resolution; "I *must* see him. Do you hear? I *will* see him! I've cracked one of his wonderful windows in the Light House, and I want to tell him."

"Take my advice and don't," replied the knight, looking at her queerly. "Do you know what the order of his Majesty of the Sun will be like?"

"No. How could I know?"

"Then wait and see! One never can guess what the King will do next. Shouldn't risk it if I were you. He needn't know anything about it," continued the Knight Light darkly. "If he does know, it might lead to something peculiar. Take my strong advice and don't. Even if I dare take you to him—which I daren't."

It certainly was not a bright prospect. But Sybil was no coward, and never wavered in what she thought to be right. Besides, the Sun-King had been so kind to her. She felt she *must* tell him. She could not possibly leave his dominion like that—breaking his property, then running away and saying nothing about it.

"Do you object to be glared at and frizzled up?" said the knight after the pause, during which Sybil had stood distressed and anxious. "Do you want to

"Sybil fell on her knees before his Majesty."

receive a stroke for your pains? If not, take my advice and don't."

Sybil tossed her head haughtily, in spite of her misgivings, stamped her foot to give herself more courage and importance, and said in tones that were not as steady as she would have liked: "Conduct me at once to his Majesty the Sun-King. As owner of this palace and honoured" (here something like a sob rose in her throat) "—honoured guest of your master, I command you to obey me—pl-please!"

"Ha, ha!" sounded in her ears, and Sybil was again alone. But only for a moment. The darkness was gradually subsiding. Slowly the Sun-King emerged from behind the cloud which had gathered about him. The smile was still there, but his face wore a reddish tinge, and looked fierce. Standing still, he glared at the poor little maid, who felt hot all over.

Clasping her hands pleadingly, Sybil fell on her knees before his Majesty, and said with tears in her eyes—

"Pray, dear Sun-King, forgive me. I have broken one of your wonderful windows, and the beautiful views have all disappeared. But it was an accident, and I am so very sorry!"

"JUST fancy that, now!" exclaimed the Sun-King kindly, and his face resumed its usual beam and hue as he chuckled aloud. "Why, you're not a thousand years old, I'm sure! And I don't know how long before that, that suncrack occurred—it is nothing else; it is as old as the hills." Sybil caught her breath with relief.

"It never interferes with the views—it was the storm just now that did that. I saw it coming on, so I snoozed for a short time according to habit. The dark cloud gathered round you, and I was not there to make the rift. But there's a silver lining to every cloud, my dear, if one waits and looks for it; that is, when I don't make it golden."

And for the first time Sybil noticed the clouds about, and each one was lined with silver or gold.

"For so truly," continued the Sun-King, "as I preside over a meeting with my old friends the Shower and the Rainbow, so surely may my shining rays of Hope be seen piercing through the stormclouds of Life by those happy ones who have found out where to seek them. Poor little lady!" he added soothingly.

"But I did *knock* against the window," persisted the truthful child, still not quite comfortable.

"Did you, now! and hurt your little self, I'll be bound. You couldn't hurt anything else here, not even if you were not you at all. I'm very pleased with you. You are good, and brave, and true" (at this unsought testimonial Sybil glowed with pleasure), "and I shall reward you, because those are qualities I admire."

Whereupon he put a shining chain, with pendant, round Sybil's neck, and said: "Accept this, little lady—it is the Order of the Sun!"

"Oh, is it mine to keep?" was all she could say in her surprise.

"Yes, my dear. I know you'll like it" (she was thanking him very prettily as he spoke). "Now I

must hurry away. My time is up. I shall often see you, and watch over you. But, little lady, we shall never meet again, up here. Farewell!"

"Farewell! Sun-King," said Sybil. She raised her hand to wave an adieu as his Majesty slowly disappeared, and the knight was once more beside her. "If you are ready now," he was saying, "there is a quick way back in a flash. My friend Somers Lightning would personally conduct you in his sheet—most comfortably. He is just going to start for the last time this evening."

"Thank you very much," cried Sybil.

"*So* pleased to have met you," said the knight airily.

There was a flash of sheet lightning, and before Sybil could exclaim "Major Robinson!" she had been deposited gently right amongst the sunflowers.

"Well, that *was* clever!" she exclaimed merrily, as she scrambled through into her garden. But her long chain had caught in the hedge, and as she stopped

to disentangle it, she heard her father saying, "I'm watching you, little lady."

"Oh, Papa!" she said, coming towards him. "I've got this." And she showed the pendant she held.

"So there's my Order of the Sun!" replied her father, surprised. "I couldn't remember where I had put it."

"Oh, dear no, Papa. It's mine. The Sun-King gave it me to keep."

Her father laughed outright; then, smiling at her, he said: "I suppose you know best, little lady. But the Shah of Persia sent me one, just exactly like that, as a reward for my behaving so prettily while I was out there."

"No," replied Sybil, looking up at the sky; "the Sun-King gave it to me as a reward for *my* behaving so prettily up there. See!" she murmured, pointing westwards.

And the child gazed spell-bound, and her heart was full of sweetness. For in the pearly grey of the sky hung ragged clouds of purple, lit with

"Right amongst the sunflowers."

a golden gleam; and far away, beyond fields of waving corn—in a glory of purple, gold, and green—she saw his Majesty the Sun sink down in lurid splendour.

Ronald's Clock

"THE clock's come! Clock's come!" shouted Ronald with delight. The boy, not more than seven years old, with his smocked pinafore flying about him, bounded up the outdoor steps into the large hall of his Warwickshire home. His parents were seated there reading, dressed for a ball.

Ronald, who had sat watching for an hour past, tired of running to the lodge-gates to look down the road, could hardly control his limbs now that it had really arrived.

"The clock's come!" he repeated, dancing with

excitement, and waving a well-worn "romping" hat. They laughed as he dragged them to the open door. Peering through the gathering darkness of a glorious summer's evening, they could distinguish several men bringing something very large. They had come by the avenue of lime trees, the scent of which was heavy on the air.

Before long the great clock was safely deposited in a place which had been specially prepared for it in the hall. When the men had fixed it up and set it working, and had gone, Ronald and his parents gazed at it in astonishment. It was even more wonderful than its reputation proclaimed it—for it was known throughout the world. It had been handed down as an heirloom for generations, and had descended to Ronald's godfather, who, having no heirs, had accordingly given it to the child he loved.

So the moment the boy had longed for and dreamed about for months since the gift was promised had come at last, and with it came the clock—Ronald's Clock!

They had heard of the extraordinary things it could do with its marvellous mechanism and its toy figures. It certainly looked every inch as though it could do them all, and more.

There were dials which told the days and the months, dials which told the years and the leap-years ; and one which showed the hourly movement of the moon. The stars and the planets moved round, true to their real journey in the heavens, and comets made their occasional appearances and turned tail, just as the astronomers foretold. Another exactly reproduced the seeming movement of the sun, its rising and setting, so that the observer need not be out of doors to know when the birds got up or went to bed. Another dial bore a beautiful picture representing the seaside. The sky and the sea both moved. The sky travelled slowly from east to west, and showed storm and fine weather. With the storm, the sea became rough, and the little vessels upon it danced merrily, even dangerously ; but when the sky above was placid again, the waves rocked the craft quite

"Ronald . . . sat watching."
(*By Kate Greenaway.*)

gently. The most extraordinary thing was that the tides flowed exactly to time, as did everything else in this clever clock. The sea rose, then ebbed away, displaying sands and rocks, until it was due to rise again.

All these dials surrounded the large central one, which told the Time. Above, were twelve little doors, all in a row, which opened in succession as each hour struck, and remained open, revealing the moving and stirring figures of some tragic nursery rhyme; whilst music played unseen the air appropriate to each. In front was a balcony upon which a stately peacock turned round displaying his tail, and then strutted to and fro in solitary glory. But at twelve o'clock, night and day, things were different. A shutter was raised mysteriously, and Cinderella was seen dancing at the ball to the strains of lively music, and the trilling of a nightingale. To the booming from a miniature Big Ben, Cinderella fled and dropped her glass slipper. Immediately the little play was over there appeared on the balcony the figure of a clown,

riding on a donkey, who passed along and shut the twelve little doors. Finally, mimic soldiers changed guard, and all was quiet.

Below was a large door, over which was written in letters of gold: "Every minute is precious; use it to do good." At each hour, after the figures belonging to it had all retired, this door opened and the figure of Father Time was not only seen but heard calling out in imitation of the human voice, "Past four!"—or whatever the hour happened to be.

Such was this marvellous clock. Ronald gazed at it with increasing wonder and delight; and it was with difficulty that he was at last persuaded to go to bed.

After his parents had gone upstairs and kissed him good-night he heard the front door slam to, and the scrunch of the carriage rolling down the Avenue sounded more and more faintly.

Ronald turned and tossed, tossed and turned as he lay in his small bed thinking all the time of that wonderful clock. He made up his mind that it must be

worth at least eleven million pounds, and he felt his vast importance as its owner.

The night was very warm, and he tried again the cool side of his pillow, only to heat it at once with his little hot head, through which all the glories of his splendid gift kept passing in constant procession. Ronald was far too excited to sleep, so he sat up and wondered what time it could possibly be. That proved a thought too tempting, for he felt he really must know if it was near an hour, and, if so, he must be there to see what his clock was going to do.

So, in the moonlight, he stole out of his room—clad only in his small pyjamas—as softly as he could, for he didn't want to be caught.

But the old stairs began to creak so loudly under his little bare feet, as though each one were saying, "I'll tell! I'll tell!" that he got the queer notion he would be safer off them, so he clambered on to the banister and slid down. Finding then that it was ten minutes to ten, he sat on the bottom stair opposite to his treasure, his chin resting on his hand.

There he waited, gazing patiently at the great clock, while its solemn tick-tack! tick-tack! kept him company, and soothed him.

The hands went steadily round until they were close to the hour.

Click! Phrrr!! came from the clock, the noise resolving itself curiously into a distinct hum of voices. Startled, Ronald rose and approached quickly. Whereupon he thought he could distinctly hear the order—

"Now then, attention! Are you ready with that hammer?"

And a surly voice replied, "I suppose I know my business as well as——"

Then a very deep voice broke in with—

"Hurry up all of you! Take care! Now, then! Time!!"

The chimes struck slowly ten. Music began the tune of "Three Blind Mice;" and a little door opened disclosing the ill-fated triplet running after a farmer's wife—a stout, merry-looking woman, who held a big knife in her hand. On the balcony the peacock turned

round and strutted up and down. When all was quiet again, the big door opened and the figure of Father Time appeared and said a little indistinctly, it seemed, "Past ten!"

"What did you say?" asked Ronald. "What did you say?" he repeated as he hurried round eagerly looking up into the figure's venerable face, and, catching hold of his long garment, followed him as he moved backwards towards and through the door. The boy was vaguely conscious that something was happening, when—snap! The door shut suddenly and Ronald found himself inside the clock!

At first the noise that was going on bewildered him. Gigantic machinery was at work all around and above, and looked as if it were made of gold.

There stood Ronald open-mouthed with astonishment! And no wonder; for he saw hundreds of tiny golden people, men and women, helping to turn the wheels, swinging the big pendulum, oiling cranks, lifting levers, dragging pulleys, hammering, chattering, scolding, grumbling, laughing, as they worked away

for all they were worth amidst the heavy throbbing and beating of the machinery, dominated by the solemn rythmical tick-tack ! tick-tack ! of the great clock.

As Ronald watched all the busy little people at work he understood at last what clockwork meant.

A deep voice sounded in his ear. It was Father Time, who had seated himself on a gong close by, and was smiling pleasantly as he said—

" Well, young man, you invited yourself, you know. You're the first that has been in here. However, you are very welcome, and can roam about at your pleasure. There is plenty here to interest you, and you shall have a guide to show you round. But take care you don't get mixed up with the works."

" Thank you very much," replied Ronald, who somehow didn't feel quite comfortable. It was all so strange. He had never been inside a clock before. Then he asked rather wistfully—

" Could you kindly tell me, sir, which is the way out ? "

"I will personally have the pleasure of showing you out, but I don't open the door again until after the hour of closing time."

Ronald did not know whether to be comforted or puzzled at this, and ventured to ask, "When is that?"

"After the hour, of course," replied Father Time, with such a look of surprise that Ronald was glad when he chatted on again in his friendly way: "*I* don't find it very interesting here," and Father Time yawned; "I'm always at it, and whenever I come amongst the work-people I hear nothing but the same old grievance concerning the twelve-hour day. They want it an eight-hour day, which is absurd when it's twelve."

"Yes," said Ronald, as it seemed expected of him.

"Consequently there is not an hour that passes but what some of them go on strike. Everything here has to go just like one o'clock; you know that, I suppose?"

Ronald nodded.

"My real home's at Greenwich," continued Father Time; "at least, that is my headquarters." Here he broke off to give orders to several workmen, one of whom went off growling out, "I suppose I know my business as well as——" whereupon his companion gave him a cuff for his head (straight from his wrist) which had the immediate effect of silencing him. Father Time gave a warning look through his spectacles at a little work-girl whose hands were lying idle on her clock-work, whilst she gazed at Ronald. The look nearly made her go off her mainspring with fright, and she vigorously continued her spring cleaning.

"We are a huge family at Greenwich, all resembling one another in figure and business. We are all twins, and twins, and twins." Father Time was laughing heartily as he said this; "two at a time!"

"Two at what time?" inquired Ronald wonderingly.

"At two, and at all times, of course!"

Ronald didn't understand a bit, but thought it more

grown-up to pretend he did, so he replied, "Ezackly!" And then there was a pause.

"But now I must beg you to excuse me," said Father Time, rising; "I'll send you our keeper to explain everything." And in a second Time was gone.

"I am to be your guide, if you please, Mr. Owner," said a lovely little golden lady, who wore a jewelled time regulator on her head, and diamonds on her hands. She tripped daintily up to Ronald and curtseyed, which he acknowledged with his very best bow.

Then she showed him all over the wonderful works and explained to him how all the marvels of his great clock were made to go. He loved machinery, and this was specially skilful and intricate. Everywhere the little people doffed their caps to him, quite aware that Ronald was their new master. And he felt very proud and very happy at being monarch of all he surveyed.

Here and there Time could be observed as he went

along quickly, but he was too busy to notice Ronald, and Ronald was too absorbed to notice him.

"No, do stay and tell me now about yourself," he said later on, turning to his pretty guide, who was going to leave him to resume her work. She hesitated. He insisted. So they sat on a musical box and he began to question her about her life. But the little golden lady had only got as far as to tell him that she was at the head of the eight-hour movement, and that they were hopeful that——

Suddenly there was a tremendous stir, and then a number of work-people rushed past them shouting and gesticulating. There was a fearful hubbub. Above all was heard, "I suppose I know my business as well as——" interrupted by Father Time's deep tones of command. Then a great clicking, whirring, deafening noise, and the chimes began to clang out the hour.

The little guide changed colour. She was pale and trembling from head to foot.

"What's the matter?" asked Ronald anxiously.

At that moment a rush of wind above them carried to their ears the distant strains of "Little Bo-peep has lost her sheep."

"And I've lost my head by half a second," said his companion in an awestricken voice. "It's my fault. I wasn't at my post." She took the ornament off her head and looked at it sadly. "Yes, I felt something was wrong. I wasn't there to regulate Time, and they are all late by half a second. Want of regulation points to irregularity, and irregularity points to my having lost my head. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" And she began to cry bitterly.

"I'll save you!" exclaimed Ronald. "I'm master here!"

"Ah! But you are powerless against Time. He waits for no man," she sobbed.

"But I'm only a boy!" said Ronald.

She paid no attention, but went on: "A half second lost can never be regained. And now you must go, dear master, for if *you* are late it will be all the worse for you, and will set such a bad example that no one

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here will ever respect you again. Quick, leave me!"

But Ronald had no intention of quitting the poor little maiden whose plight was caused through him. So, with quick determination, he lifted the tiny figure in his arms (she was no bigger than a little doll) and following her whispered directions, hurriedly arrived at the front door.

"Let me hide!" she said in her fear as Father Time approached. And she crept into her protector's pocket.

Father Time touched his forelock as Ronald went out smiling, but then asked imperiously: "What is that bulky thing you are carrying? It is spoiling the set of your clothes."

Ronald's heart stood still at this, and he could feel his little burden shivering with fright inside his pocket.

All of a sudden he had an idea—to put another question in his turn to Time, so as to take off his attention.

"What's become of your scythe?" he inquired.

"Funny thing!" replied the old Father in surprise;

" that's just the very question Julius Cæsar was asking me only two thousand years ago! I keep it at the head office—that's Greenwich now, as I told you. They look after it there. Sharp! Past Eleven!"

"So late?" replied Ronald boldly, as he got away, quickly adding: "Well, good-night, good-night! I *have* enjoyed myself. Thank you very much."

Luckily there was no time to say more, for he was outside and the door had shut. Ronald's first delighted thought was: "I've saved her!" and then he pondered, "Whatever am I going to do with her?"

"Hulloa!" he uttered aloud, "I'm sitting on the stairs!"

Which he truly was, his chin resting on his hand, which hand he lowered at once anxiously to his pocket. Only his handkerchief was there. He looked in. No trace of the little golden lady was to be seen. His surprise increased as he glanced down.

"I'm in my pie-jimjams!" he murmured in astonishment.

Then he rose and walked thoughtfully back to his room, somewhat perturbed, and staring with a doubtful look at his bare feet and his pyjamas to make sure he really was walking upstairs.

Tick-tack! Tick-tack! He could hear the sound behind him.

Ronald looked back, straight into the face of his clock.

It was Past Eleven.

Violet and the Doll-Fairy

Part I

THE FAIRY SPEAKS

THE Decima Ward is quiet again. All the merry laughter has rippled away, and sleep has closed the eyes of the little hospital inmates who had gazed in such a rapture of delight at the great Christmas tree—now just a simple fir again, shorn of all its splendour, its toys, its flags, and its lights. Jolly old white-bearded, scarlet-garbed Santa Claus has come and gone—(some would have it, by the door!)—leaving behind him the memory of his toys and kisses and his jovial laugh as he distributed to every child a present from that wonderful tree. On the very topmost tip of it there had stood the loveliest Fairy Doll you ever

saw. Her turn had come at last. Taken with much ceremony from her lofty place, holding her wand outstretched, and smiling on the group of happy children and their beaming friends below, she had been presented to the "pet of the ward," as she was called—Violet, the sweetest little girl that nine years old can show, or is ever likely to be seen again.

The large veiled dolls'-house that is to be shown on the morrow is still in its dark corner, now only lighted at intervals by the fitful flicker of the fire in the huge open grate. Each time the flame springs up one can see that every cot holds a little red-eared face with a toy beside it. One tiny child sleeps peacefully, clasping in her arms a little toy black terrier, whose glass eyes look very wide awake as they stare at the fire without a blink. But Violet's cot holds none but Violet, for quite close beside it, to save the crushing of her white muslin frock, the Fairy Doll sits stiffly upright on a chair.

* * * * *

The big clock upon the mantelpiece ticks loudly in

the stillness of the night. A cat mews piteously outside, and then is silenced by a neighbouring bell beginning to strike the hour of twelve.

On the last stroke, Violet stirs. Then she sits up, and asks dreamily, "Where is my Fairy Doll?" She looks very tired and sleepy, but her eyes suddenly open very wide indeed as she hears a soft little voice at her elbow reply, "I am here!" She turns, and to her intense astonishment she sees that the Fairy Doll, still sitting stiffly upright in her muslin frock, has come to life! A light sparkles from the star in her hair, and in the star on her wand, shedding a ring of radiance just large enough to surround her with a mysterious light, by which Violet can see that the Fairy's lips are no longer wearing their fixed smile, but are quietly laughing, and emitting a little low, silvery laugh.

"Oh, Dolly! Can you talk?" cries Violet, with a sudden thrill of amazement and delight.

The Fairy bends forward heedless of the question, and, pointing with her wand, says, "Look!"

Looking, as she was told, into the dark corner she could see that the dolls'-house was no longer covered up, but bright with twinkling lights behind the windows. The rooms, clearly, were only just being lighted up, for as Violet gazed, more and more of the little windows came sparkling into view. Now, she could plainly see that it was a large two-storied country house with bow windows and a verandah, and a porch covered with flowers, with an imposing flight of wide steps leading up from the front garden.

"Oh—h, Fairy! How beautiful! Why is it lighted up?" asked Violet in a breath. "What does it mean?"

"What does it mean?" repeated the Fairy, who by this time had slipped down from her chair and was shaking out her long golden hair—by which the light in it was seen to flash like a diamond, and to glow like a live coal. Then, with her soft little laugh, she added as she stood close to Violet—

"It means that Madame Poupette, the mistress of Dolls' House, is giving a fancy-dress ball to-night

in honour of her daughter's wedding. It is going to be a very grand affair. All the smartest people will be there, as her parties are famous for the celebrities she receives. Would you like to go ? "

" Oh yes, please ! I should like to go very much indeed, if you could get me an invitation. I love parties ; I have never been to a fancy-dress ball before."

" Very well," said the Fairy, taking hold of her hand. " *I* give you the invitation. Come with me."

Violet was out of bed in a second. She held the Fairy by one hand, and with the other she lifted her long white nightdress. As she tripped across the dark ward her little bare feet made no sound upon the floor, and, of course, the Fairy's tread was noiseless too. The fire had burned low, but in the light of the glowing embers she noticed that the Fairy must have grown taller, or she herself must have become smaller, because the difference in their height was not so very much after all. But then, Violet remembered, she had no shoes on, so that perhaps might account for the difference.

They had arrived in the garden of the house, and it was rather cold. The breeze was blowing her dark curls about and lifting the Fairy's golden locks, and it bent back the trembling shrubs and bushes all around them. Violet held her companion's hand tighter as she drew her white gown more closely round her. She wondered why she saw no other guests arrive.

Her heart throbbed faster as she looked up at the house. The scent of roses perfumed the air, and every window was lighted up. She and her companion mounted the wide steps. A pretty stained glass lantern, in which shone an electric light, revealed by its rays the long-handled bell. Standing on tip-toe, the Fairy seized it and gave it a hard pull.

"*Ding-a-dong, ding, ding-dong,*" resounded loudly through the stillness. Then the silence was broken by a dog's bark, just like that of the little black toy terrier barking as though it were alive.

The front door was opened by a very smart flunkey in red plush and gold lace, black silk stockings, buckled shoes, and a white wig. The Fairy pointed with her

wand and he preceded them upstairs. Violet followed immediately behind, and noticed that he seemed very stiff in the joints, which she concluded must come from his grand manner and superior breeding; she also observed that his ribbon garters were fastened on by two tin-tacks.

"How very odd!" she thought to herself; "and rather untidy, too."

Before she had time to realize it, they were in the drawing-room and the door was shut to. The only inmates of the room were Madame Poupette, who sat upon a sofa facing them, and her daughter, the bride, who was next to her. Standing stiffly behind them was a gentleman who she could see was the bridegroom, because he wore a white flower in the centre of a large white satin rosette fixed in his buttonhole. He appeared uncomfortable in his clothes, which were of the peculiar cut which suggests home manufacture. Madame Poupette was saying: "I wonder if that bell announces the first arrival." She spoke with a very strong French accent; but it

did not need that to show her nationality. One had only to look at the dressing of her hair and the style of her gown to know it at a glance. She wore wonderful diamonds, too, and looked every inch a grand lady. Violet at once recognized in her a lovely doll dressed in pink silk trimmed with gold, from which her neighbour little Eva had turned away in tears in her love for old Stump, who had no head, no arms, and no legs. She thought she also recognized the bride and bridegroom, but wondered where she had seen them before.

They did not reply to Madame Poupette's remark. It was very plain that not one of the three had seen or heard Violet and the Fairy, for they were profoundly unconscious of their presence, and began busying themselves with the bride's veil, which had become ever so little disarranged, but which, in their anxiety, they made worse and worse.

Violet forgot her surprise as she thought of her manners. Stepping as daintily as she had been taught how towards Madame Poupette, and with each hand

slightly lifting her gown, she made a graceful curtsey, and was about to wish them "good-evening," when the Fairy gently drew her aside, saying in a rather off-hand manner—

"Don't trouble about them, my dear. Dolls never see mortals. They couldn't if they tried. That's the reason why they always stare so and never recognize you. Surely you must have noticed when you talked to a doll how strangely it stared back without replying."

"Yes," said Violet wistfully, "I have noticed that many a time, and wished—oh, how I have wished —that it would talk and be more companionable, or show some love in return for all of mine. And then sometimes I have thought that it *would* like to talk if it could, and that it did really understand and was really good and kind, though it wouldn't show it."

"Well," continued the Fairy, "dolls don't mean to be unfeeling, as you will see for yourself to-night. It is simply that they cannot see living people; you are quite invisible to them."

"But I never knew before that dolls could really be alive."

"There are a great many things that little girls don't know. Dolls only live when mortals cannot see them. Their instinct tells them when. You would not see them, nor even me, a Fairy, alive now, had I not been given to you because—for a reason. By pointing with my wand I can destroy their instinct in your case. But I have only the power of doing so to-night—only this once. So make yourself quite at home and comfortable here, and watch all that goes on, for you can never have such a chance again."

"And you?" asked Violet. "Can they see you?"

The pretty Fairy broke into her silvery laugh—she always seemed so ready to see the funny side of things. "You seem to forget that I am a Fairy doll, and that with my wand I can, when I am alive, make myself invisible whenever I please. Now stay here, enjoy yourself, and I will come and fetch you later, for I am wanted downstairs."

Thereupon the dainty little figure suddenly bent

her knees as Violet had seen the fairies do in the pantomime, before springing into the air; there was

"She floated right through the door."

the soft laugh again, as she floated right through the door, and disappeared.

"Well," thought Violet, "that *is* a nice easy way of going upstairs or down."

But her wonder at all she saw and heard changed to dismay as she remembered all at once that her feet were bare, and that her costume was scarcely fit for the ball-room. She wished the Fairy back again, so that she might consult her on this important point; but with a feeling of great relief she recollected that of course she was invisible, and that it didn't matter after all. Yet she felt it would take a little time before she became used to her novel position.

Words of impatience fell upon her ears, and she turned again towards the three dolls. She saw that they had become quite mixed up in a tangle of white tulle veil, which was getting dreadfully torn. The exclamations came from the two ladies, and the blushing face of the very boyish bridegroom showed his confusion as he drew his small shining shoe out of a rent in the material. But Violet could not keep her eyes any longer from the surroundings.

"What a lovely room!" said the child, looking round; "but the furniture all seems either too large or too small, and I'm quite sure it will not wear well

from the look of it. It's nearly all made merely for show, and that's the fact."

She walked round to examine the things with curiosity; but she took care not to touch.

It certainly was a pretty room, with gilt furniture upholstered in red velvet. On the floor was a white drugget for the coming ball. Pale blue and gold paper lined the walls, on which hung some not very well painted pictures. Violet was not a judge of art, but even she noticed that they were modern daubs; and she could hardly believe that any were by Royal Academicians. There was an imposing fireplace, but the fire, Violet thought, must be some new-fangled affair, for it looked like red glazed paper and gave out no heat whatever when she spread her hands before it; all the same, the room was comfortably warm. Electric lights hung from the ceiling.

This ceiling was certainly rather low for the size of the room. The flower vases, the piano, and the birdcage were surely too large in proportion; while the fender, the writing-table, and the looking-glasses

were as much too small. There were some things too, which Violet thought should not be in a drawing-room, such as a sewing-machine—of which the treadle only worked, the top not being thought so important a part of the mechanism—and an umbrella-stand that held two tightly-folded brand-new umbrellas; but she made up her mind that these must be wedding-presents.

Violet had taken in everything so quickly that she sat down in a comfortable armchair in an out-of-the-way corner just as Madame Poupette said, by way of continuing her first remark—

"No, it evidently can't have been a guest."

"*Ding-a-dong, ding, ding-dong.*"

The unseen terrier barked furiously this time.

"Now, that *must* be an arrival!" added the lady quickly; "it must be getting late, Angelina."

"For goodness' sake don't get flustered, mamma!" answered Angelina imploringly; "Jack has already shaken my nerves quite enough," and the bride looked

ruefully at her veil. He bent over and whispered something in her ear, but she shrugged her shoulders and refused to be comforted.

It was only the post. John brought in the several letters on a pewter tray.

"What's the use of bringing me letters when it is guests I'm expecting?" asked his mistress snappishly as she took them; and she glared at him so fiercely that he apologized and withdrew in a hurry.

Violet was not too far off to see that they were very funny-looking letters. "Why, they are those squares of chocolate!" she exclaimed aloud. "Just the same as those which dear old Santa Claus gave us when he pretended to be the postman." But no one heeded her, and she was all attention again as Madame Poupette undid the pink ribbon from round a letter, handed the tablet of chocolate to her son-in-law—who broke it in two and munched one half, whilst his wife nibbled the other—and read aloud what was written on the inner side of the ornamental paper wrapper. The letter ran as follows—

"Dear Madame Poupette,—It is with the greatest difficulty that I can see to write. An unfortunate accident has occurred to me. Can you imagine such gross carelessness? I was left sitting down, quite comfortable, thinking of the new costume I intended wearing to-night, when I found to my horror that my chair had been placed too near the fire. How any one can bear to have that kind of hot fire I cannot understand! It is so dangerous—so different from our own! It became fiercer and fiercer until I was in such an unaccustomed heat, I thought I should have melted on the spot. Dear Madame Poupette, you will easily conceive that I really feel much too waxy to appear at your ball to-night. But I beg you will not put it off on my account. Pity me in my disfigurement and disappointment.—Your loving friend,

"Rosie."

Violet hardly knew whether to laugh or to be grave, but the sight of the dolls' glum faces stopped her smile.

"I do pity her. It's very sad!" remarked the youthful bridegroom.

"What is sad?" came from his mother-in-law, so sharply and unexpectedly that he started, and felt he must have put his foot in it again.

"Dear me, you *are* clumsy!" said his bride tearfully. "There won't be a bit of veil left soon—only one large hole." He looked perplexed at that.

"I only meant that it is a pity Miss Rosie cannot be here," he mildly explained to Madame Poupette, who had fixed him with her stare, and only took it off as she retorted reproachfully—

"A highly unbecoming thing for any one in your position to remark. Angelina and I can deplore her absence and the cause of it, but if she is present or if she is absent cannot make a bit of difference to you. As to putting off the ball," she added reflectively, "I should only feel justified in doing that if nobody came." And she began trying to tie up the holes in the tulle, while Jack drew forth the lace-trimmed pocket-handkerchief which bulged out of his pocket,

making the set of his coat even worse than before. With the back of his hand he felt his eyes, but, as he might have expected, they were quite dry, so finding he had no use for it, he put the handkerchief back again and sat down.

He had forgotten, however, that he had been standing up, and that there was no chair ready to receive him. Down he went like a piece of wood, full length on the floor; and there he remained, for the ladies paid no attention to him at all. Madame Poupette had taken up the second letter, put the whole piece of chocolate into her mouth, and was reading to herself, with Angelina looking over her shoulder. Violet became anxious about the poor boy, so she went round to where he lay.

He looked all right, she thought, but he lay so very still that she wondered if he could be dead. She felt his heart—or the place where it ought to have beat, but it did not; and his hands were as cold and white as china. Still, his face was rosy and healthy-looking, so she felt quite sure he could not be seriously ill. She

decided that the most sensible thing she could do was to put him on his feet again, which she accordingly did without any difficulty, and was pleased to see that he must have forgotten all about his fall, for he immediately became absorbed in reading the letter along

"John brought in the several letters on a pewter tray" (*Page* 119).

with the others. As she supposed that there could be no secrets in it, Violet did so too.

She could not get a very good view of it, but she saw that it was another letter of apology for absence,

from a gentleman who signed himself "Willie." He explained that a month ago he was alone in a room, lying comfortably on a table, when a mischievous boy came in and pushed him over the edge. The fall broke off both his legs, and, contrary to his expectation, they had not yet been replaced. Up to post-time that day he had reckoned upon the operation being performed, but had been doomed to disappointment. And so he greatly regretted that he still felt too upset to appear—quite unable, in fact, to stand upon any sort of ceremony.

Madame Poupette sighed, placed her hand on her heart, rose from the sofa, and remarking that she had had enough chocolate and was sick of it, and that too much was bad for any one, no matter how much they liked receiving correspondence, she flung the other letters away unopened, so that they fell right into Violet's lap as she sat in her place again.

From force of habit, Violet said "Thank you," and found that the chocolate was more delicious than

any she had ever tasted before. But when she looked for writing at the back of the wrappers, she found it must have vanished, for there was none to be seen by mortal eyes.

Part II

THE FANCY DRESS BALL

NOW the three hosts were standing, all smiles, for the guests began to arrive, and followed each other at close intervals. Violet thought she had a dim recollection of having seen them all before, but was much too interested to stop to think where. It was a wonderfully novel and pretty sight, such as Violet had never before dreamed could possibly exist, even as she sat there in her night-dress, leaning back in one of the comfortable armchairs in a corner of Dolls' House drawing-room, her large grey eyes wide open in wonder, and her dark hair clustering round her pretty, excited face.

Sounds of beautiful music floated into the room when the procession of arrivals was headed by a little shepherd and shepherdess. They tripped in, dressed

in pale green and pink satin, with tightly curled white wigs on their heads, and with knots of ribbon with very long ends that hung about them and fluttered as they moved. Under her arm the shepherdess carried a tiny lamb, with pink ribbon and a bell round its neck, which kept unnaturally still, and with her other arm she waved her crook, whilst her swain sounded an occasional note upon his pipe, and thought it very fine.

Then entered a Dutch lady, with a very wooden-looking head, an unnaturally sudden complexion, and her hair parted in the middle and well plastered down ; her square and bony shoulders looking squarer and bonier in the square low-necked dress. She joined heartily in the general laughter as two darkies appeared in the doorway in striped clothes, enormous collars and bows, top hats, and long boots in which they executed a flap dance to the strains of a "coloured" tune played by one of them on his banjo.

A Chinaman came waddling in, his legs wide apart and the first finger of each hand pointing up-

wards, while his head nodded continuously as if it were loose in its socket, and his tongue came out and in, keeping time with his head. His pig-tail was very long, his moustaches drooped very low, and his eyes and eyebrows had a surprisingly curled-up appearance. All the same he was a very worthy man, was this Chinaman, who had come all the way from China to be present at Madame Poupette's ball, because, as he remarked to the bridegroom, he could wear his national costume, and so avoid the expense of hiring a fancy dress.

In trooped the guests in quick succession. It was a highly diverting sight to watch them, because as they entered they all acted their various parts according to the fashion at fancy-dress balls in Madame Poupette's native land. And as each fresh arrival advanced to salute their hostess with mutual compliments and congratulations, and took their stand with the others round the room in order to watch the fun of the newcomers, the unseen orchestra varied its music by prearrangement.

"The Golliwogg!" In stalked a strange, ungainly figure with black face and shaggy hair and eyes that

"A Chinaman came waddling in."

gleamed like stupid boot-buttons under their heavy brows. He had thick red lips with a nose above them

which even his own mother could not have thought pretty.

Certainly, one can never judge by appearances; for, strange to relate, instead of every one being frightened out of their wits at the sight of him, they welcomed him with the greatest cordiality and pleasure, which, in the circumstances, spoke volumes for his kindly disposition and popularity. Uncle Golliwogg was one of the many celebrities present. He kissed the bride gallantly, and she didn't mind a bit, but thanked him for the present he drew forth from his pocket and offered her with a deep bow. It was a square piece of cardboard upon which were stitched a necklace with locket, brooch, and ear-rings, all in coral and gold. His choice was much applauded, at which Violet was rather surprised, for she had noticed five others exactly the same, piled one on top of another on the table; in each case the price—1*s.* 6*d.*, in ink —had been carelessly (or purposely) left on. The bridegroom put this handsome gift on top of the rest.

Just then Madame Poupette began to "feel the heat"

present was a square piece of cardboard, upon which were stitched a necklace with locket, brooch. and ear-rings, all in coral and gold,"

somewhat, and had a window opened. She sat near to it and began fanning herself vigorously. As she showed signs of stiffness, Jack at once rushed to a table and took from a pile similar to the other, a card on which, kept in place by black elastic, were a tiny hair-brush, bottle of scent, comb, and tablet of soap with a painted red rose stuck on its wrapper. He slipped out the scent-bottle and brought it to her ; she did not trouble to undo it, but sniffed at it gracefully through the cork. At the thought, too, of her daughter being about to leave her, a tear would roll at intervals down her cheek. This performance was much admired, for the guests had only heard of, and never before seen, this latest French fashion of displaying one's emotion. Violet watched those tears, fascinated. For, although Madame Poupette dabbed at them with her handkerchief, they did not dry up, but moved, hard and solid, slowly down one cheek, and lost themselves inside the neck of her dress.

"I should not like to cry tears like that," thought Violet. "They must be so dreadfully hard and un-

comfortable, and I wonder whether they melt inside, and where they go to and remain."

Ally Sloper, who had been waiting in all his war-paint outside the door until the sensation caused by Madame Poupette's tears was over, then rushed in, and before she knew where she was, the hostess felt herself raised up in his tight embrace, whilst he insisted she was his long-lost mother. This notion was a great success, and made her and everybody else laugh so heartily, that they did not stop until the last of the guests arrived—a most dainty little "1830 lady," who tripped in, conducted by an equally elegant partner to the piano. He sat down to it and struck some notes which gave forth the tinkle-tinkle tones of a spinet, and to them she sang an old-world ditty so simply and sweetly that every one was delighted at its charm.

A brisk waltz struck up and general dancing began. The ball was opened by Madame Poupette and Ally Sloper in a fantastic step, followed by Uncle Golliwogg, Jack, and Angelina—the three dancing

something which looked uncommonly like "a ring, a ring o' roses"—whilst all the rest whirled round in couples in the usual manner.

It is difficult to imagine how animated the brilliantly

"Scotch soldiers danced with Japanese ladies."

lighted room became! It was quite clear that no one had thought of milliners' bills when ordering these elegant, jewelled costumes! Scotch soldiers danced with Japanese ladies; clowns with Welshwomen;

Indian savages with nurses ; and others too numerous to mention all went through quadrilles and waltzes, lancers and polkas. Round and round they went and kept going—unless they went square and square —with untiring energy and zest. No one ever sat down to rest, or even thought of doing so.

But something fresh was going to happen. Every one seemed to guess that. The Master of the Ceremonies was hurrying round the room, and invited them all to form in procession ; and they began to march round to the strains of stirring music. And then a very long table was brought in, and placed along one side of the room. It was already beautifully laid for supper, covered with dishes of poultry, savoury meats, vegetables, cakes, and fruits, all elegantly shiny, varnished and glazed.

"Just like those pretend dishes in the toy-shop windows," said Violet, very truly. "But supper in the drawing-room is such a very queer arrangement!" Then she recollected having seen a dolls'-house which, from the outside, seemed to have heaps of rooms,

but when the front was removed, it was found to contain only a drawing-room and bedroom over a kitchen and pantry. Perhaps this one was built by the same architect. Besides, the umbrella-stand still bothered her. She certainly had seen no hall, and remembered that the staircase must have joined on to the front steps.

The procession had formed in perfect standing order round the supper-table—chairs were evidently not required. Bottles upon bottles of champagne were brought up in ice wine-coolers, and there was such chattering and clattering, such popping of corks, and such merriment, that Violet found one pair of eyes hardly enough to see everything with. The wedding-cake—which, in very bad taste, she thought, bore the name of the old-established firm who made it, in large letters of red sugar—was cut by the blushing Angelina. And then Uncle Golliwogg took the occasion to make a speech so side-splittingly funny that every one was convulsed with laughter, and more than one guest coughed and choked, when healths were

drunk, at the mere recollection of it. At which Uncle Golliwogg grinned to such a degree that it was a mercy his large mouth only just escaped meeting at the back of his neck, or the top of his head would certainly have come off.

Cries for Tinker were now raised. For no family gathering under that roof was ever complete without Tinker. Up he came, scrambling and barking and leading John at the end of a chain—Tinker, who had barked so loud at the beginning of the party, when the bell rang. When he was let loose, straight into the middle of the room he ran, to John's pride and delight. Tinker was hailed with laughter and cheers, for he was dressed like one of his Majesty's soldiers, and looked quite martial in helmet and breastplate. He acknowledged the applause with a series of sharp barks, marched on his hind legs to Angelina's word of command, halted, right-about-turned, all with such soldierly precision that the audience was astonished at his cleverness.

"Now," said the bride, talking to Tinker as though

she were the Commander-in-Chief, or a sergeant of Volunteers, or some other fierce warrior of that kind, "isn't this Christmas weather too cold for you to be on sentry duty at this time of night?"

Tinker snorted, snorted again, then gave a violent sneeze.

"Ah! I am afraid you really have caught a very serious cold," she added.

Whereupon Tinker looked very woe-begone; sneezed several times in quick succession, and then dropped like a lifeless mass, pretending to be dead. A minute later, when he was still "dead," he cheerfully wagged his tail to show that he really wasn't, as he cocked one eye round the corner to show he expected a reward. Biscuits and sugar were thrown to him in such profusion that in his greedy hurry he swallowed them all whole, like an elephant, and then, becoming excited at such an unusual amount of appreciation, he forgot all about the remainder of his tricks, raced round and round the room, took particular notice of John's calves, seemed astonished, hesitated a second,

and then bit a large piece out of the right one. John yowled as, with a vigorous kick from his sound leg, he lifted naughty Tinker high up in the air and sent him whizzing through the open door and down the stairs.

Violet, shocked at such an ending to the performance, hurried forward to see if she could help the wounded. She quickly understood that although only sawdust was spouting from John's wound, that did not mean they were not real calves, but that the poor fellow was made of sawdust throughout.

Like other little children, Violet had been taught that people were "only dust," but she had never before imagined that it could really mean sawdust. Perhaps, she explained to herself, from always "seeing dust" it had come to be called "saw-dust," and was much the same after all. She wondered what could be done in this case, and if the wounded one were going to sawdust to death.

Fortunately there happened to be a doctor present. He was a remarkably important-looking personage,

dressed in black, looking very grim and wearing an odd expression, half wise and half foolish, as he came forward to treat the patient. He pompously explained that he had witnessed Tinker bite the leg; but then he shook his head and admitted that he did not quite grasp what could be the matter with the man. At this, Violet could not help interfering, and said—

"Why, he is suffering from a dog-bite in the leg, of course," and added under her breath, "What a stupid he is for a doctor! Any one can see that the man has got a dog-bite even if one had not seen it done."

But nobody heeded her a bit, and she began to regret that she was invisible. And she felt inclined to cry as the doctor shook his head again and John yowled dismally on, as he noticed his sawdust falling in a heap on the carpet. So she was glad to see Madame Poupette approach the doctor and timidly ask him if he did not think that John might be ailing from the bite of a dog.

"That is very possibly the case—very possibly

indeed"—and his face brightened as he added, "I must have surgical instruments this very minute: give me a screwdriver, a hammer, a piece of black silk and some glue."

They were immediately produced from under the sofa, where they were thoughtfully kept in case of need.

Violet watched with great interest, and attentively followed this lesson in First Aid to the Wounded. Taking up the screw-driver, the doctor first deftly removed the tin-tack from the garter—John being quite composed and quiet throughout—took the garter off, turned down the stocking, gathered up the sawdust on the floor, placed it in the gaping hole, kept it in place with a piece of the black silk which he wrapped round and glued on, replaced the stocking, hammered the tin-tack into its place in the garter; and John was quite himself again.

The incident was immediately forgotten as Madame Poupette announced that the surprise she had prepared for her guests was about to begin. Violet was

only just back in her corner again, when in the doorway appeared a herald. He was dressed in white satin thickly embroidered all over in silver, and his silver trumpet was ready raised to his mouth. He blew a loud blast, at which twelve little couples,

"He blew a loud blast."

exquisitely costumed, entered and danced a graceful minuet. This was such a great success that, much to the gratification of Madame Poupette and all concerned, it was encored three times.

"Those are the dolls that are always sent by the

invalid lady for the Christmas tree," mused Violet ; " I had no idea they could dance like that ! "

At last the time had come for the bride and bridegroom to bid adieu. There were affectionate leave-takings all round, and Madame Poupette again displayed her emotion, to the envy and delight of all present. Some of the guests clustered on the balcony and threw rose leaves and kisses at the departing couple. Sir Roger de Coverley was then struck up. Ally Sloper insisted upon being first couple with Madame Poupette, in order to keep her spirits up, he said, and very well he succeeded. And all the merry party bobbed and jigged, advanced and retreated, curtseyed and twirled, till every one was out of breath from so much exertion and fun.

The ball was over. The guests had all gone. Madame Poupette glanced at herself in one of the long mirrors, satisfied that her hair was not tossed nor her beautiful pink dress tumbled. She touched an electric bell and told John to put the lights out and lock up the house. There was evidently something

very queer about both John's legs now. Madame Poupette noticed it at once, and said—

"John, what is the matter with both your legs? They hardly seem able to support you!"

The black patch had disappeared, but his legs certainly were very queer indeed. He smiled as he replied thickly, "That is all through Tinker, madam."

"But he only bit one leg, so that would not account for the queerness of the other. Which was the injured one?"

"I don't quite know, madam. Since I changed the stocking before supper, one leg seems worse than the other." And he lurched heavily against the sofa, which rolled at the push, leaving him sprawling on the floor. Then Madame Poupette, murmuring, "Poor man! It really was too bad of Tinker!" she put out the lights herself, and everything was in darkness.

But only for a moment. For the Fairy stood in front of Violet, with the sparkling light again in

her hair and on her wand, casting that radiant ring around her dainty little figure.

"It is late, dear," said the Fairy, as she took her firmly by the hand. "Come quick!" Violet felt very, very sleepy, dazed and confused, and murmured as she rose to go, "How pretty! Oh, Fairy! Where am I?"

* * * * *

Another day awoke, and with it Nurse Lilian. The dawn had begun to steal into the ward in its cheerless, stealthy way, that very cold Christmas morning, as the Doctor, on his early round, stood at Violet's bedside with Nurse Lilian next to him, holding a light in her hand. He had thought to satisfy himself that his little patients were none the worse for all their unusual excitement, and was pleased to find that all here were well. For a moment he took Violet's hand in his, and watched her as she lay smiling in her sleep. She sat up in bed and murmured, "How pretty! Oh, Fairy! Where am I?" and she sank back into her peaceful sleep again. The Doctor pointed to the tiny Fairy sitting so stiffly

in the chair, and smiled; so did Nurse Lilian, as he turned to continue his rounds.

* * * * *

It is such a bright and sunny morning! And there is Nurse Lilian bustling about the ward. There is Violet, broad awake and smiling. There is the Fairy in the chair quite close beside her. There is Tinker lying motionless, but safe and sound, and looking very roguish, on little Eva's pillow. And there stands the Dolls'-house under its cover in the corner. The other children are talking gaily, as Violet carefully lifts her Fairy Doll on to her lap. She takes it by the hand, and, kissing it gratefully, she says out loud, for she is sure it can hear—

"Thank you very much indeed, Fairy, for taking me to the fancy ball at Dolls' House. It was all so *very* lovely, and I did enjoy it so!"

The children hear it too. They look at each other, puzzled, not knowing what she means. But Violet and the Fairy know—and they mean to keep it a secret between them.

A Regular Bouncer

THERE is no doubt that everybody should be truthful ; every one who is really nice always is. As I am so, you may believe me when I tell you that my name is Redwool Ball. My skin is as soft and elastic as indiarubber, so that in order to protect it I wear a red wool knitted coat, which is smart-looking, and fits my tubby little figure to perfection.

I am a real bouncer—or, in the nice sense, a regular bounder. Some folks might think that a doubtful compliment, but other people think it my greatest merit, and in consequence my spirits often rise very high indeed. I have no digestion to boast of ; in fact, my inside can only claim to contain a bell-like voice, and plenty of air allows me to talk very distinctly without stammering. For everybody knows that one cannot talk distinctly and be sure of not

stammering without plenty of air in one's lungs—"junder bunder?" [Toy language for "do you understand?"—but perhaps the translation is not required. I always find that children know such a lot of things one never thinks they do.]

I have told you my own name at once, because the first question I always like to ask of my playfellows—those towards whom I feel drawn—is, "What is your name?" "What is her name?" "What is his name?" until I know all their names, and then I suddenly feel as though I had known them and played with them all my life. But there was a time—that was soon after I was born—when I had no one at all to play with, and I felt lonely and sad.

Then came a joyful New Year's Day, when I was sold for a bright new sixpence to a dear little chubby boy with flaxen curls. He and I were both scarlet with pleasure when we met, and bounded together with delight. "What is your name?" I kept asking. Whereupon he put up a little fat finger, shook me gently, and said, "Hark!"—and then giving me a

wet kiss, he remarked, "Teddie likes Ball!"—leaving out my first name, which sounded a trifle familiar to me at first, until I got used to it. As we went forth into the world, that very wet kiss was repeated, this time with something sharp tearing at my coat and letting in a dreadful draught. I implored him to be treated more gently, and Nurse backed me up; there was a scuffle, a cry of impatience—and I was promptly put into her pocket. I am quite sure he didn't mean to hurt me, and I told her so all the way home, but she wouldn't listen. Those little teeth were certainly sharp, only they were few and far between; besides, perhaps he hadn't yet got accustomed to having any at all. So I forgave him and loved him all the same.

We had a good romp when we got into his bright nursery, where we were left alone to amuse one another, and we heartily enjoyed that game of hide-and-seek together. With his two chubby little hands he threw me down as hard as he could, looked surprised to see me in the air, laughed, gave a tiny, heavy jump too—his whole mind suddenly absorbed in that

jump—whilst I managed to take the opportunity of rolling softly away and hiding. Then he would call out "Ball!" stoop down, resting his fat hands on his fat little bare knees, peer around anxiously, and suddenly, with his joyful "I see it!" we would begin all over again.

But soon our game was unpleasantly interrupted by the entrance of an elder brother—a horrid schoolboy, who whistled out of tune, and who seized me roughly from Teddie's feeble grasp. The tiny fellow hurried to rescue me, when, to my dismay, I saw him pushed impatiently aside so that he fell helplessly on the floor, those few teeth of his making a grand display in his open mouth while he screamed with vexation. The tears streamed down his flushed cheeks, and his little feet worked and scraped away on the carpet. Nurse rushed in, caught him up, and tried to soothe him. As she was half afraid of interfering with the young tormentor, I determined to put matters right. "Oh, my eye!" said the boy. "Sixpence for this rot!" (I had never been called

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anything so rude in all my life.) "This soft thing is no use to play cricket with!" (Of course, I wasn't strong enough to play such a rough game.) "What a waste! Ted, shut up!" "*Monstre que vous êtes!*" replied Nurse, who was French, as she vainly strove to hush the sobbing child.

Their mother—so pretty she was!—hurried in and ordered her firstborn out of the room. "Oh, my eye! What a fuss!" he kept on saying at intervals as he talked and argued, and would not go away. "For goodness' sake, don't use that vulgar expression," protested his mother. "I am really tired of telling you about it all day and every day. If there is anything the matter with your eye, you must bathe it with rosewater, or wear a shade over it, or put a piece of raw beef on it—for you must be cured of it." So angry was the young rascal at this, that, seeing a smile on Nurse's face, to my horror—for I am very polite myself—he actually aimed me at her head. With the greatest difficulty I managed to miss her, and then, seizing my opportunity, I took a

"He screamed with vexation."

header off the wall, and although he tried to dodge me, I bounded straight into the young ruffian's eye. "Oh, my eye!" he howled as he was led away; and never again did I hear him use the expression his mother so much disliked, for the recollection of my performance was evidently too painful. Pleased at my victory, I rolled gently towards Teddie, in order to attract his attention and comfort his outraged feelings. I was quite successful, and peace and laughter reigned once more.

I dreaded that schoolboy's holidays. As they regularly came round, it was always a time of suffering for us three upstairs. One afternoon, when my little master had gone to a tea-party—with his hair extra beautifully curled—and I was lying behind the toy-box, thinking quietly of the world and its funny ways, the enemy came in. He immediately began a search for me, which made me feel worsted all over at the mere thought of the treatment I usually received at his hands. I lay very quiet indeed, and he was just

giving me up for lost when he clumsily knocked against the box, and there I lay revealed.

He had often been forbidden to touch me, as I was Teddie's favourite companion ; he had even promised not to do so. I tried to remind him of all this, but to no purpose. I was caught up, banged with violence all about the room, until, in my anxiety to escape him, I managed to bound right through the window-pane, and dropped amongst the flowers in the garden below. He knew I should be missed, so he came out as quickly as possible to find me. But that was not so easy, and this time he did not succeed, for the geraniums matched my scarlet coat and kindly helped me to hide. "What was that noise?" asked the pretty lady, opening her parasol, as she tripped down the verandah steps to where we were. "I didn't hear any noise," was the answer. "What are you looking for?" she then asked. "For—for a flower for you, Mother dear," came the false reply ; and as she stooped to kiss and thank him, I felt red with shame ; the shocked geraniums lowered their blushing faces and were

grateful for the cooling breeze, and at the moment the sun in sorrow drew a passing cloud before his face. But I determined it should be no fault of mine if such a falsehood were not exposed. An hour later it was found that the nursery window was broken, and Teddie's cries told them that I was missed.

Nurse guessed what must have happened, and came down. After a patient search, she discovered me with a piece of glass sticking in my coat, and to which I obstinately clung, for that was the proof which would establish the truth. She straightway took me to her mistress. Then the culprit was brought before me. While the white hand which held me trembled painfully, I charged him with his deceit, and his eyes dropped their lids after a glance at the proof I held. I must own to a certain pleasure when I heard him ordered to solitary confinement for the rest of the day, with a *menu* of bread and water.

Before the next holidays came round my little playmate began to ail, and one day, as he clutched me to his breast, it was found we looked so much alike in

colour that there was no doubt about it—Teddie had the scarlet fever. He was more indulged than ever now—in fact, had quite a good time, and fully deserved all the petting he received. Then it was that I was able to show him all my friendship. I amused him all the day long, and watched over him all the night through—until one evening, when I did a foolish thing. Teddie was sleeping, when I thought it would be fun, and a change besides, to roll from off his cot on to the floor. Unfortunately, by doing so, I got in Nurse's way; she stepped upon me and nearly fell, frightening me out of my wits. Whereupon she picked me up, popped me into a drawer, and there I lay—a heavy punishment—neglected and forgotten.

Weeks rolled by, and the little boy began to mend. I expected to be asked for, but Teddie's memory was clearly as short as himself. Although from where I lay I could hear all that was going on, I felt very dull indeed, and also very ill. Soon afterwards the room was empty; then new papering and painting took

place. Still I remained in the dark and lonesome drawer, and saw nothing of the healthy smartening up of our nursery.

Teddie was expected home, and my spirits tried to rise, but sank again when, on the same day of such good news, I heard that dreadful schoolboy's step upon the staircase. He was answering "Yes, he *did* understand he was not allowed to go into the nursery," on account of the wet paint. Nevertheless, he did come in, so softly and stealthily that no one heard him, and he began to rummage about with as little noise as possible. At last he opened my drawer, and uttered a low cry of delight as he saw me. He took me up and carried me into his bedroom. Arrived there, he pulled out his penknife—and then I thought that my last hour had come.

Stooping over me, he made a large hole in my coat that I was so proud of, and never heeding my groans, he traced a circle in my tender skin, saying, "I intend to get that bell out. I wonder however it got in!" His dreadful purpose was plain. I was to

be made voiceless, and was never to talk again. It would kill me for certain, but perhaps he hadn't thought of that. Luckily his knife was very blunt, and I resisted it with all my might—but that dreadful boy evidently meant to work his cruel will, when, to my great relief, he was suddenly called. Jumping up guiltily, he threw me on a shelf in a cupboard amongst his clothes, where I breathed again, lying motionless and quiet after my terrible fright.

You will never guess how I punished him, although I did not want to, for I felt too thankful for my safety to be revengeful. Still—he caught the fever from me. Everybody said I had given it him. I had been neglected instead of being disinfected. The doctors said I was certainly the cause, and it soothed me to hear on all sides expressions of regret and self-blame at not having given me a thought. And that poor boy was ill indeed. I was very glad of that, because, as it happened, good came of it.

When he was so weak and his case was given up as hopeless, something seemed to change him. He

became more and more gentle ; he listened to reason, and was very grateful for all the kindness shown to him—so grateful, indeed, that he tried to give less trouble and became thoughtful for others, and did not complain. It was a time of deep anxiety. But doctors are not always right ; he did recover, and found how much happier he was, and grew into a really nice boy. I felt I had helped to make him different, and the sight was a cheering one.

As for me, when Teddie heard all the talk about me, he suddenly remembered my existence, and would hear and think of nothing else. They tried in vain to turn his attention to other things—old toys were brought forward, new toys were given him, members of my own family were introduced to him—he would have none of them—he wanted me, and me only ; and I then understood how he loved me, and that he really had not quite forgotten his old Redwool Ball. They could not find another just like me, and I was thankful for it, as my playmate remained firm and true. I was made thoroughly well, and put into

a new red coat. I was restored to him, and am now free again to gambol about while Teddie's pattering feet toddle gaily after me during our games of hide-and-seek.

Princess Reta of Regalia

Chapter I

ONCE upon six o'clock, when the sun was thinking about going to bed—only thinking, because he was accustomed to sit up till later than that in the summer—the waves were rolling head over ears and playing leap-frog on the shore. They were frothing over with fun, and at intervals would lie broadly smiling before running back to begin their gambols again.

Those frolicsome waves would dearly have liked a peep into Regalia City, which was only a few yards away. But try as they would, they never managed to get so far.

It is impossible for a person without a very good memory for geography to explain where Regalia City lies. Even in the toy shops, where they have

all heard of Wonderland, they are not able to produce a map of that country. However, Regalia is there somewhere, and is situated by the sea.

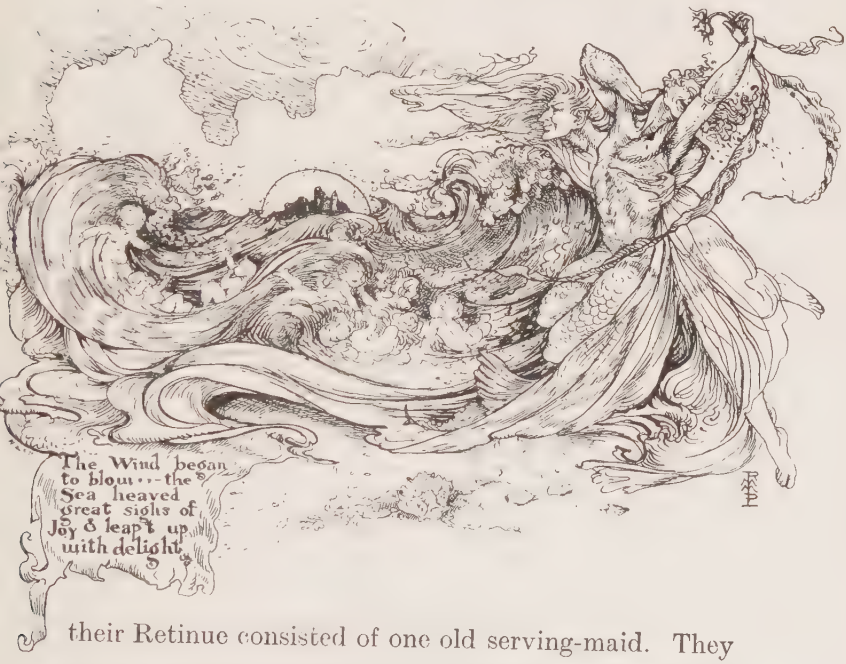
Now, as soon as the sun had retired and tucked himself up in his bed of clouds, the wind began to blow with such strength and fury, that the sea heaved great sighs of joy, and leapt up with delight. Those two meant to make a night of it, and let the ramshackle, tottering old City know it, too.

For Regalia was not a city such as one usually thinks of, but a vast, confused mass of cottages and huts, shabby, decaying and decayed, hardly better, though infinitely larger, than any old fishing village of our time.

In the middle of what once was a garden, but was now a dreary wilderness, stood the Royal Palace, so ruined and dilapidated that only in three rooms was it possible to live; and they were about as suited for a King and Queen as a hencoop for a bird of paradise.

But they were not pitied by their subjects, this

King and Queen, because they were not at all nice, nor did they behave as such. They had no glittering host of courtiers, no rows of splendid servitors:



their Retinue consisted of one old serving-maid. They had no peacock served up for dinner—they had meat only once in the week, and nothing very good during the rest of it.

The Queen was no grand-looking lady in ermines and diamonds, but was small and angular, and as ill-dressed as she was ill-tempered. The King was no fine gentleman, with stars on his chest and a garter to keep up his left stocking—but an untidy, stupid old man, who had been weak enough to follow his father's bad example, and had lost what little money there was to lose by betting and gambling with any foreigners who happened to call at his shores. He would even make himself more stupid still with strong drink, so that he might not understand the scoldings of his wife, which lasted from morning till evening, and often far into the night. Indeed, one day, when his head was so fuddled with drink and scolding, he had taken the two Royal Crowns to a foreign merchant, and had willingly pocketed four half-crowns instead.

And the Queen had rated him as stormily as the wind which he had raised intended to blow him up to-night. So the King had now no more money left, and that of his consort was barely enough to feed

"He had taken the two Royal Crowns to a foreign merchant."

and clothe them and pay the Retinue, who had remained with them for thirty years, in spite of a strong desire not to stay another day.

The life of the Royal couple, therefore, was not a happy one. Then the abuse and curses of their subjects were so constantly in their ears, that their Majesties only managed to shut them out by shutting themselves up.

The country had become wholly impoverished and as to the famous pearl fisheries, why, even the oysters had struck work, and refused to make any more pearls; wherefore the King and Queen had eaten them all up for supper.

Chapter II

THE wind blew hard and the wind blew harder. It howled through the old ruins, rattled the old casements, scared the scampering rats down the old staircase into their holes, and whistled through the crevices of the door on to the King's old nose, as he was snoring on a broken chair in his study. It flew at him suddenly with such gusto that it blew up his eyelids, his eyebrows, and the few hairs on his bald head, all at the same time. The roar of the sea tried to deafen the whistle and scream of the wind and the growl of the thunder. The rain insisted on having a voice in the storm, and poured down in rattling and splashing torrents.

The King's nerves, or his conscience, became so agitated, that he even preferred the wretched

company of the Queen in her room, where, at least, the great drops didn't come in through the ceiling.

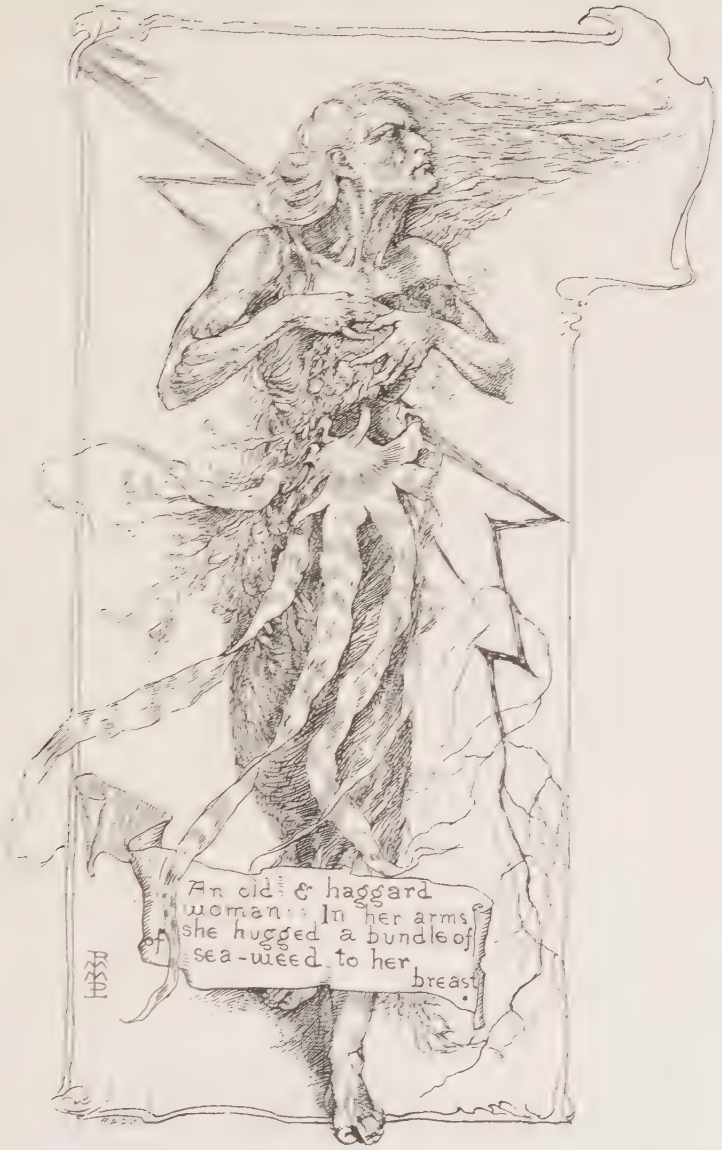
Down the creaking stairs and gusty, rumbling passages he scurried like a rat, bigger than the rest, stumbled over the Retinue, who was asleep on the mat, and entered the old banqueting hall, in one corner of which stood the great state bed, with its velvet hangings all dusty and tattered and torn, while the old gilt crown, which should have ornamented the top, hung upon a peg on the door. For the Queen was in the habit of wearing it every evening for supper, to worry the King, at the same time inspiring the Retinue with awe. Wizened and hard-featured, her Majesty now lay there, broad awake. Her husband sank into the armchair beside her, which promptly snapped one of its legs under him, and, from sheer habit, she began to scold. But her voice, for once, didn't carry—the howling of the wind and the surging waves did him that service.

At the end of the vast room, opposite them, was a large, high window, round which huge, neglected

cobwebs hung like curtains: and against this window the storm beat with concentrated fury. Faint with fear, the Queen held her tongue, and the King the bedpost. The bed was absolutely rocking, and so was the whole rickety Palace.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash of lightning, and at the same time the noise of a thunderclap. The casement flew open, and the scared monarchs beheld, borne in on the rush of the wind, an old and haggard woman, streaming wet, who stood and gazed at the Royal pair. Her white hair was blown straight forward into the room, framing with its disordered mass her wrinkled face, which glistened strangely. Her throat was bare and knotted; a sodden garment, with clinging shells, hung tight about her form. In her arms she hugged a bundle of seaweed to her breast.

The King and Queen trembled violently as their unwelcome visitor advanced slowly to the great state bed, and laid her burden beside her Majesty. Then the stranger retreated backwards, and with her shrivelled arms waved farewell.


An old & haggard woman. In her arms she hugged a bundle of sea-weed to her breast.

The King and Queen, speechless with terror, buried their heads in their hands. The wind blew the casement to with a bang, and they looked up. The old woman was gone. The rain stopped suddenly, and in a moment the moonlight stole in and illumined the bundle, which certainly was there, rub their eyes as they would.

The Queen was the first to recover, and she began curiously to finger the seaweed next to her. "It's treasure!" she called out shrilly, in delight. "I see some pink coral; a little pink coral coronet; beautifully carved, and of great value!" Another glance—another closer look, and she lay back and gasped.

The King rose quickly at the pleasing news, as if he didn't mind storms a bit. The sight that met him was a tiny babe, with seaweed round its little arms and legs, and a pink coral coronet upon its head, and two large blue-green eyes, set in a sweet little face.

As the King looked eagerly, a voice that seemed

to come from the casement floated in. It said: "Call her Princess Margaret, for she is the Pearl. She will be a pearl amongst women and a woman amongst pearls. Treat her well, and she will bring you good luck."

"It's that old Fury," cried the King, running to the window. He threw it open, and looked out. No one was to be seen.

Chapter III

THE dawn had not yet broken, but the waves were taking little rest. One followed another in ceaseless, calm, rhythmical procession, as though they intended never, never to stop rolling and breaking and foaming millions and billions of times on the soft yellow sand.

Not a human creature was about—only jelly-fish, star-fish, all manner of beasties in shells, and crabs in plenty.

The first lights in the sky were casting a glow over the sleeping city. But the Royal pair were not asleep. They had sat up all the night through, lamenting their fate and cursing the helpless infant.

"Another mouth to feed!" grumbled his Majesty.

"One more body to clothe," added the Queen.

And they cast an unkind eye on the unconsciously happy babe.

"Good luck! Good luck will never come to us, so it's no use expecting it. The people are so malicious" (which wasn't true), "and they are angry enough with us" (which served them right) "that they will never believe us when we tell this wonderful tale."

And they discussed how best to get rid of the little encumbrance, and were beginning to quarrel over it when the entry of the Retinue with the morning tea made them hold their peace, and they bade her sharply hold hers when she looked, and saw, and rejoiced.

But somehow the wonderful news got about.

So when the poor, starving fisher-folk rose from their beds on the floor, they marvelled greatly to hear there was a little Princess born to them, and they surged round the Palace gates demanding if it were true. But the King and Queen would only show their haughty disdain, and not their ugly faces, and

it was the old serving maid who proudly undertook the honour of the official introduction. Standing at the open casement, she held on high the beautiful child, still wrapped in seaweed, with the coral coronet upon its head.

The people gave a faint cheer, and the King and Queen looked at one another and scowled.

But mingled with their pleasure, the honest fisherfolk felt sore ashamed that a Royal infant should so lack fitting raiment as to wear what they would scorn to see wrapped round their own bairns.

And that day was proclaimed a holiday, like the rest, for there was no work to do; but there happened to be a good haul of fish close in shore, so they ate their fill and were satisfied.

Their Majesties, however, were in no way satisfied. One of the first things the King had done was to lay hands on the tiny, marvellously-wrought coronet, so that he might pawn it. But scarcely had he grasped it when he let go with a cry of rage and pain, so violent was the shock that he received. He tried

again and again—each time more carefully—but every time he touched the coronet he, or either woman who attempted it, was rewarded with a dart of pain. So very soon the idea of meddling with it was given up altogether.

They discovered, too, that the pretty child was of a supernaturally happy disposition. She never cried. If the Queen pinched her, she screamed. If they let her go hungry, she moaned. But no tears ever dimmed the brightness of her eyes.

She was named Margaret; and, of course, there was no ceremony or pomp, or circumstance, for there was no money to buy any with.

But the Royal pair did not follow out the rest of the behest: they did not treat her well. They were forced to abandon the idea of making away with her, for they feared the vengeance of the people, who took delight in her. So they neglected her entirely, and but for the kind, soft-hearted old Retinue, the little girl would have starved for aught they cared, and welcome.

To the fisher-folk she was so sweet, and at times she wore such a yearning, wistful look, that their rough natures softened towards her, for they did not consider her one of the hated Royalties. And that was wonderful; and what was stranger still, the coral coronet clung to her fair brow as if it grew there and expanded with her growth.

ON her sixth birthday, when the little Princess Reta (as she came to be called) was playing on the golden sands, alone as she always was, a young seagull—the largest ever seen in Regalia—detached itself from a group of fellow birds and flew towards her. To her pleasure, it perched gently on her

shoulder, and she saw that there was a circlet of golden feathers round its neck. She stroked and loved the noble-looking creature, and it did not leave her. They became great friends. When she slept, the seagull watched beside her; and when the King and Queen scolded or ill-used her, he would fly at them and frighten them out of their royal wits. And what was more, try as they would, he managed so cleverly that they never could hurt him or get rid of him.

Years rolled by as regularly as the tides, and the little twelve-year-old maiden still loved to linger all day long as near as might be to the sea she loved. Her devoted seagull was always with her, but his love was not greater than the reverence of the people who had come well-nigh to worship their lovely Princess.

She was an eerie-looking little maid, with large, sad eyes, which shone blue and green. The pink coral coronet encircled a mass of brown hair, into which the wind would blow the clinging seaweed.

Her locks hung straight and long to the frayed edges of her silken sea-green draperies, which were torn and stained with spray. These draperies, which enveloped her slender little body, had formed part of an old State gown of the Queen's, and had been put together by the Retinue. When the little frock would hold together no longer, another would be made from the same source to replace the worn-out rags, and her legs and feet were still as bare as a fisher-girl's. But no one could mistake her, although there was no money to buy shoes and stockings with. For her bearing and grace were those of the proudest Queen—so thought the sea-gull, as he sat upon the water and watched her gazing past him, passionately out at sea, with those glorious eyes which had never yet held tears.

Then she called in her soft, sweet voice, which had the sigh of the wind in it, and a whole flock of seagulls came circling round and round her, feeding gently from her hands, from her lips, the bread she had saved for them, and picking the crumbs which

had fallen about her feet; and woe to the careless gull whose peck touched her tender flesh, for he of the golden feathers was there watching, and they knew it! And the fisher-folk were there, watching too, and they never tired of marvelling at the sight, for the seagulls of Regalia had never been friendly with any one before.

Away the birds would go, flapping their wings and screaming their good-byes. Then the wavelets would come up reverently to pay their daily homage and kiss her feet. Sometimes their temper was uncertain, for when she wished to play and ran away to tease them, they would get vexed and unruly, race roughly after her, stumbling and foaming with anger, seize her round the waist, and throw her down. But she thought it great fun, and would go on till she was tired, and the seagull, sedately awaiting her good pleasure, was glad; for then they would go away together to visit the cottagers.

Little Princess Reta was always welcomed by these good people whenever she appeared, for

poverty-stricken as she was, she lived in the Royal Palace much as they did in their hovels. So she never knew there was discontent throughout the land. But now she was old enough to understand the miseries of her future subjects, and one day a very old fisherman told her the tale of his lifelong wretchedness. He was the first to do so; and suddenly a feeling of intense pity stirred the tender heart of the Princess, and tears—real tears—gathered as a wavelet, rolled over her shining eyes, broke against the lids, and slowly glided down her pale cheeks in two great briny drops.

At that sight the seagull, perched on her shoulder, uttered a hoarse cry, and where he had stood there appeared a handsome youth, who had not been seen before in Regalia.

They questioned him, and found he was both deaf and dumb. His strong, lithe figure was clad in a sailor's weather-stained red shirt; his blue breeches were rolled above the knee, and a red tasselled cap was set far back on his dark curls. Around his bare

throat, the princess saw tattooed in gold just such a coronet as she wore upon her head.

And they gazed, marvelling, into each other's eyes.

Chapter V

THE following morning the City was all astir with excitement, for the old fisherman had found two large pearls, and the people wondered if they dated from the time of the great pearl fisheries, and decided that they must have been lost and had strangely come to light.

But the old fisherman said Princess Reta had brought him good luck. He sold the pearls to a passing merchant, became a rich man at a stroke, and blessed her whenever she passed his door.

The King and the Queen were very jealous, and demanded his money, but the people protected him. Then they tried to make him pay a tax for treasure trove, but he proved that the pearls were found within his room, and not on the land outside. Then the Royal pair scolded Princess Reta for not bring-

ing them luck, too, whereupon the Retinue ran out and spread that fact. Then all the people assembled and held a great conclave before the Palace, and swore to protect their beloved Princess; and they threatened the King and Queen with pains and penalties if they should show her violence.

Their unworthy Majesties were greatly terrified by the wrath displayed against them, and nobody pitied them a bit.

Among the crowd was the young stranger, and as the Princess Reta came out to thank her friends, she saw in his black eyes a world of kindness and chivalry, and she bent her proud head and gave him a little smile. He made his way towards her, and gallantly kissed her hand, and as he did so he could both speak and hear! With his first words he declared that he would protect her if need be, and the Princess, distressed at the loss of her faithful seagull, straightway accepted the youth as her companion.

He could give no account of whence he came or

what was his name, so he was called the Prince, by reason of the royal golden coronet about his neck. He was always there just when he was wanted, and the little Princess felt very, very happy.

There was one thing she began to long for. She had never seen pearls before, and the two which the old fisherman had found took her fancy so, that, as many girls have done before and since, she conceived a great desire to wear some. She had never known before what it meant really to want for anything, for she had never seen anything that was wantable, and money, which every one grumbled for, was an unknown sight to her. But now she had such a longing for pearls that she understood how much worse it was for the very poor to lack the bare necessaries of life, and she felt all the more for those who were hungry and suffered from wants which she had not the means to satisfy, and from ills which she could do nothing to assuage.

So no day went by without her passing a great portion of it trying to comfort some poor body

"Princess Reta."

who had a stirring tale of misery to relate, and this would bring the tears of pity to the soft eyes of the little Princess.

And strange to relate, the very next morning the loveliest pearls would be found in some nook of the hut. Then they were sold, and money flowed into the land, and the name of Princess Reta was blessed wherever she went. For wherever she happened to go, the same good luck followed in her footsteps, and the people began to flourish, to work, and to prosper. A share of their possessions they offered her in gratitude, but she gently shook her head, for two more years had come and gone, and love and content were in her heart. The fisher-folk could not understand that sort of happiness, and thought it wise to store away their gifts for her for some future time if she would not accept them now.

But no one pitied the King and Queen, and no good luck came to them, and they were so angry and jealous that they would no longer speak a word to Princess Reta.

No wealth came to Regalia's adopted Prince, perhaps because he was so happy without it, and had no tale of woe. The little Princess let him join her in her races with the waves, and she was so gay and light-hearted that to him also the world seemed brighter and more beautiful than ever it had been before. She had even promised for the first time to accompany him on the morrow in his fishing boat.

They went, and after she had helped catch the silver fish, they drifted over the sunlit surface of the blue sea, and their hearts throbbed with silent joy. And the little waves rippled over with laughter. "Hush-*sh*! Hush-SH!" they murmured on the shore to the questions of the jelly-fish, of the star-fish, of all manner of beasties in shells, and of the crabs, who were inquisitive. For the sea alone knew the secret of the boy and girl.

The sea
Alone
Knew
The Secret

Chapter VI

NOT long after this, Princess Reta was seen no more as usual on the sands looking out to sea, or watching the fine houses and buildings which were springing up on all sides. Do what they would, the people could get no news of her.

But the Prince contrived to make his way into the Palace, and he reached at last a bolted door, through which the old servant whispered to him that she and the young Princess were kept close prisoners because the latter refused to obey the Royal commands.

"What commands?" asked the Prince anxiously. Then the Princess came to the door of her prison and told him through the keyhole that now she was fourteen years old, the King and Queen would wait no longer to carry out their long-fixed intention of marrying her—selling her, indeed—to a rich old foreign

merchant with whom they had been bargaining for many years past, ever since he first saw her. On the morrow he was coming to fetch her away.

The Prince whispered a few hurried words of comfort, and stole stealthily from the Palace, thinking as he went of his betrothed.

That night poor little Princess Reta couldn't sleep for thinking of her fate. She might have been so happy ! And she began to lament her sad lot, as she had pitied that of the poor fisherfolk, so that the tears, as of yore, welled into her eyes, and she wept, and wept, and wept till at last she fell into a heavy sleep.

As the first ray of sunshine stole in and kissed her, she awoke with the feeling that she was lying on the pebbles by the shore, and that the waves were coming nearer and nearer, murmuring and beckoning her to go to them. But soon she recognized the familiar walls of the room she was in. She was very uncomfortable. She *was* lying on pebbles--at least so it seemed. Then the Princess gazed in amazement. She lay on a bed of the most magnificent pearls !

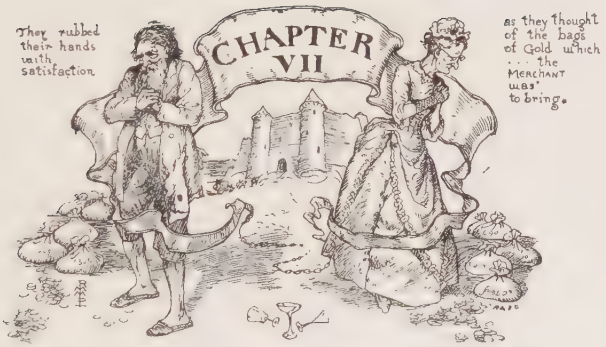
And her eyes, full of wonder, now opened to the fact that these must be her tears of pity turned to pearls, for never had she cried from any other cause, and that it was she, and she alone, who had been the means of bringing prosperity to all the land. Her tender heart went forth in thanksgiving for the power of doing good that had been vouchsafed to her. Then she remembered her former wish which love had made her forget, and which now at last was gratified, and, for the moment, she thought not of her troubles in her pleasure and surprise.

She looked again at her treasures, and set herself to hide them in her silken robe, and no one but herself was the wiser. For something prompted her to keep her secret—fear perhaps of the wicked old King and Queen. Then laying her hand on her bosom she touched her beautiful pearls, and thought, with a smile, how the people could no longer call her the beggar Princess, for she was rich beyond words in treasure and in love.

Suddenly the Retinue rushed into the small cham-

ber and pushed the great bolt of the door behind her. She hurriedly drew her young mistress towards the window and said, breathlessly, "Come quickly, dearie. The Prince has come to save you. He has fixed a ladder to the tower window. All about is quiet. Quick! go, dear child, and may no harm befall you."

Princess Reta kissed the faithful old nurse, and, placing in the palm of the astonished woman a handful of her pearls, she stepped through the open window right into her lover's strong arms, and he bore her quickly down, and away in his boat to sea.


They rubbed their hands with satisfaction
CHAPTER VII
as they thought of the bags of Gold which the MERCHANT was to bring.

THE King and Queen woke late, as usual, and for once in their cross old lives their faces looked glad. They rubbed their hands with satisfaction as they thought of the bags of gold which in a few hours the merchant was to bring. And they discussed how they would leave Regalia secretly, and buy a new country, and spend the money there all on themselves—on fine food and drink, a fine palace, regal attire, and jewelled——

FOLKESTONE

A tramp of many feet, and sounds of angry voices were suddenly heard at the gates of the Palace, loud above the beating of the waves on the shore, which had as suddenly begun to roar out a duet with the rising, blustering wind.

The Royal pair turned pale, for there was a mighty hubbub without.

"We want to see our Princess, Princess Reta of Regalia!" yelled the crowd.

"You shall! you shall!" timorously shouted the King, putting his head out, and as quickly putting it in for fear of its being blown off.

He and his wife shuffled off to the Princess's room, to order her to show herself, and let it be known that she was safe.

And the crowd waited, somewhat pacified to know that she was alive and well, for they had been anxious for her safety.

The King and Queen hurried to the door, which they had bolted on the outside of the passage. It divided that part of the Palace from the rest, and

they were satisfied that both Princess and servant were safe prisoners, and that no news of the shameful transaction could get to the people until it was completed, and they, in their turn, had had time to escape. To their dismay, neither of the prisoners was there! Nor could they guess that the Prince had carried off the willing bride for his own; nor that the Retinue, after unbolting the door of the Princess's chamber, had shut the window from the outside, climbed down, and removed the ladder, and now was busy hiding her pearls in the old garden.

So they searched high and low, and were in a fearful state of rage, and of terror too, for the populace began shouting furiously again, and above the tumult threats were heard that they would come and see for themselves, for now their blood was up.

And come they did, and no mistake; smashing the gates, tearing down the doors—the wind aiding them with all its might—demolishing everything in their way; whilst the sea roared in the distance, breaking closer inland than had ever been known before.

First they captured the terrified King and Queen, and kept them guarded in their apartment; and then they tramped all over the place, but found only the Retinue, who was hiding *herself* now, as she didn't know what was going to happen. She was brought to where the Royalties were, and all three were questioned. What the old servant knew, and told them in triumph, was news indeed, and the King and Queen ground their few remaining teeth at the failure of their long-cherished scheme. The people cheered lustily, and praised the devotion of the Retinue, and then they set themselves again to pouring their curses into the ears of their rulers.

At this moment, there walked into the Palace the merchant bridegroom. He looked round, started, and regretted he had come. He was shot out, like an arrow from a bow, and within three minutes of entering Regalia, he found himself outside of it, congratulating himself on having left nothing else behind him but his money-bags.

In the confusion, the King and Queen, in fear for

their lives, managed to escape. It was not so very difficult, as their subjects were careful to look another way. The pair fled towards a far distant land. As they plodded along, footsore and hungry, they had plenty of time for reflection and remorse. Then they remembered the words borne in upon the wind, and realized at last that the babe which had been confided to them had brought good luck to every one but themselves.

Chapter VIII

THE morning was still not far gone when the men fought their way against the wind to the beach, to gaze seawards. Such a storm in Regalia City had not occurred since a certain night fourteen years ago.

Buffeted as they were, they stood their ground, and strained their eyes as they watched in fear for the safety of the lovers whom they saw in the distance. They knew that so frail a craft could not long hold a living burden in such weather.

They got out their largest and swiftest boat, and struggled for the honour of risking their lives to save the Princess and her sturdy lover. As they neared the skiff she filled and sank, and the Prince was battling with the waves, bearing up on his strong arm the life that was so dear to him, while over the sweet, pale face of the Princess swept the waves she loved so well.

Close by, as if racing the fishermen's boat, the figure of a white-haired, haggard old woman (so it seemed to be) swam with swift, strong strokes towards the pair. The sailors, in alarm, strained every nerve. And as they hauled the fainting youth with his precious burden into their boat, the strange apparition looked at them out of glistening eyes, clutching in her hand a coral coronet, and dived down into the depths of the heaving ocean. A long wail, as of a siren, throbbed through the waters, and the sailors muttered a hurried prayer.

Later, when they talked of it, they found no one who would believe their story.

But all believed in the gallant rescue—all joined in the rejoicings that followed. Great was the surprise at sight of the splendid pearls that peeped through the mesh of the Princess's silken draperies. The people told one another that they had been washed around her in the sea—in the sea which had taken her pink coral coronet, for it was no longer upon her head—in the sea, which had washed away the golden circlet

from the Prince's neck—in the sea, whose billows had cradled them both at birth, and whose bosom would have rocked them both in death.

And when Princess Reta found herself safe in her lover's arms, and safe in the midst of her people, who acclaimed them with delight as their King and Queen, for the first time she shed tears of joy—natural tears they were, then and thereafter.

The Marriage and Coronation soon took place. The little Princess Reta looked very grand as queen, and very lovely in robes of mother-of-pearl satin. On her bosom lay many rows of the most perfect pearls ever seen before or since, and on her head rested the ancient crown of Regalia.

And she told her husband the secret of the pearls that had brought good luck to the land.

But he replied that she was the loveliest pearl of all —a woman among pearls, and a pearl amongst women.

And that is what happened in the wonderful old City on the Sea, the prosperous city of Regalia.

Snowdrop's Tale

Chapter I

WHAT a glorious fire! (mused Snowdrop contentedly, sitting upon the hearth-rug one afternoon, as she curled her tail about her). That is one of the reasons why I find my home so comfortable. Plenty of fish, plenty of milk, plenty of petting, plenty of liberty. I am very glad indeed that I was born here. Goodness! is that a speck of mud on my side? Whatever would Mother say, were she here

to see it ? I fancy I can hear her purring, as it catches her sharp eye, "Snowdrop, keep your fur clean, or you might get the moth in it." There, it is off now. I take a real pride in my lovely white cloak, but I'm not stuck-up about it now, as I used to be when I was younger. What I have been through has cured me of that. It *was* an adventure !—and there might have been very little of poor Snowdrop's tale to tell. I often think of it all as I sit before the fire like this !

There is another hour till tea-time, I heard my little mistress Elsie say before she went to play with her friend—that friend who had so much to do with my troubles.

It is a long time ago (but I see it as though it were yesterday) when, as I was sitting on this self-same spot, Hero burst in, pulling Mistress Elsie after him all round the room, by the end of a chain she held. She was laughing merrily, and her pretty fair hair streamed out behind her as she ran. He was the most enormous dog I ever set eyes on, and as I stared at the terrifying scene in horror and astonishment, the dreadful

brute suddenly caught sight of me. I was rooted to the spot, spitting with vexation, with my back well

"With my back well arched."

arched—and no wonder. In one bound he was close to me, then he paused. Gathering myself together

for the combat, I flew at him, spat in his face, boxed him on the nose, and scratched it well. The next minute he had roughly rolled me over and over, and barked!

There was such a fuss as we fought and struggled, people rushing in, dragging at the chain to stop the murderous creature from killing me outright; while they tried to grab me before I could scratch his great eyes out. They scolded, and shouted, and pulled; till at last I found myself exhausted, panting and terrified, but triumphant, in Mistress Elsie's lap, whilst she vainly tried to soothe my ruffled feelings and smooth my rumpled fur.

When I looked round, the enemy was no longer in the room, and people were saying: "What a splendid St. Bernard Uncle has given her!" The news didn't tend to cheer me up. But when some one added, "That kitten stood up to him like a Briton," I felt quite pleased and proud. All the same, I had never been so insulted in all my born days—and in our own house too!

That was our introduction. A low and vulgar fight—a common brawl! When, with a good deal of difficulty, I had recovered my dignity, and was quietly taking some refreshment, in stalked the new arrival in a very superior manner, and looked at me in a funny way, which struck me as being in very bad taste and extremely provoking. Containing myself as best as I could, I said, with a toss of my head—

"Mongrel, please to understand—none of your saucy ways with me. You have your kennel outside, and I advise you to stop in it and keep your place. Yours is the outside of the house; the inside is mine."

His eyes blazed at that with a threatening glow, and he came so much nearer that I thought that another battle would have to take place. But this time I never turned a hair, and placidly kept a bold front. He put his big head down, sniffed, and then replied, in a low, gruff voice—

"I shall come in and go out just as I please, to protect little Mistress Elsie. *Your* mission in life,

Miss Stuck-up-piece-of-Manginess, is to scamper about the basement, and clear it of mice and such-like vermin."

"Miss Stuck-up-piece-of-Manginess," he said!—he actually said that! I quivered with indignation. That's what he called *me*, clothed in my lovely white fur, the pride of my life, the boast of my mother, and the envy of the whole neighbourhood! The rest of his sentence was as nothing to this fresh affront. My tail quivered from side to side with anger, so, lest he should notice it, I turned and ran out, leaving him in my cosy corner lapping up my milk. In a state of fluster I ran straight to get advice from my old playmate Black Peter, who lived not far off, just close to the Post-office.

"What had I better do?" I asked, when I finished the story I came to tell.

"Do?" quietly answered my friend, with a wise blink. "Treat him like scum of the earth."

So from that day, when Hero was near, I showed him my superior position in the house and in society

by bristling up defiantly if I noticed him at all ; and on his part, he scornfully pretended not to see me. Thus we lived each in our own way. We were not upon visiting terms.

Chapter II

SEVERAL weeks went by, when a memorable day arrived. It was that on which dear Black Peter asked me if I would marry him. He desired to leave his home, for he was deeply offended with his mistress. The previous morning, as he lay curled up in a chair fast asleep, she had suddenly made a grab at him, and as he started with pain, she pretended, with a laugh, that she had mistaken him for her muff. It was very foolish of him, of course, but he allowed the circumstance to prey upon him, and so he made up his mind to leave and find a new home. I told him I would arrange that he should come and share mine. Then he asked me to take him "for better or for worse," and I promised to take him for better. We were consequently as happy as

two young cats in high good humour at their bright prospects could possibly be.

Now, on that self-same day, more frolicsome and jolly than ever, I determined to carry out a plan I had

"Curled up in a chair fast asleep."

made a long while before. "Nothing venture, nothing have," thought I, but if I venture something, I added, I may have a dainty dinner. I licked my lips as I thought of what I should catch for Peter and me. For up in the nursery there lived what I longed for,

with all my heart and stomach. An overfed canary, stupidly loved and cared for by those who looked after the silly yellow thing, hopped restlessly about in a cage, hung well out of the way of any greedy attempts of mine to reach it. Its terror at sight of me whenever I entered the room was most amusing.

Well, upstairs I ran, and was just beginning as usual "Do I intrude?" when my heart stopped beating with surprise and joy, for I saw the room was empty and that toothsome morsel hopping about, not in its cage, but actually on the floor! One second was enough: a spring—and the delicious bird was well under my paw, when in the next second, to my wonder and vexation, it was freed by Mistress Elsie —whose presence I had been much too excited to notice—whilst Nurse held me tight by the back of my neck, in spite of all my struggles. And then there was such a fuss! Such crying by Mistress Elsie over poor pretty Dicky, whom I had not even hurt—and such a scolding and beating I got from Nurse!

All for nothing, I fell into deep disgrace, so deep,

that when on the following day—which was to be my wedding day—Mistress Elsie's friend called in, I was, to my amazement, actually given away to her as "the cat who could not get on with Hero and Dicky, but who was very clever at killing mice," for which virtue I was gratefully accepted. I mewed piteously for mercy, but to no purpose; whilst Hero, who had witnessed my humiliation, capered all round the room, barking with pleasure, Mistress Elsie caressing, quieting, and hugging him all the while, which made me perfectly ill with envy.

It was thus, in shame and disgrace, that I left my dear old home. I was taken away, a very long way off—streets and streets away, and I made the journey packed in a basket, in which I could not move, and could hardly breathe. I was cramped, frightened, and hungry. And my heart was nearly broken at the thought that Black Peter would not know what had become of his bride, how greatly I had been wronged, and how deeply I was to be pitied.

Chapter III

THE new home was not by any means so pleasant as the old one. They buttered my feet, as though I could not find my way anywhere without butter if I chose, in spite of my travelling basket, and in spite of any silly device of the kind that people think so clever. But a serious trouble was the way they locked me in. The idea was to keep me shut up within certain limits with but scant attention paid to my meals, in order that I should get hungry and lively, and rid the place quickly of mice. Alas! Hero's words of my life's duty had come only too true. What was the use of my lovely white fur to me now that there was no one to admire it? What could I do but wait patiently for the opportunity of scampering about the basement, depending on sport for my dinner? My pride was humbled to the dust.

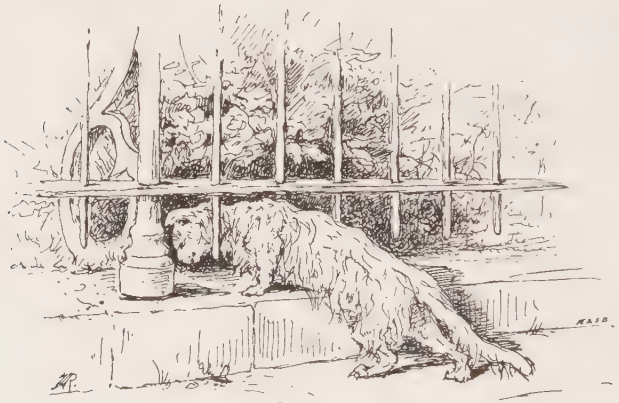
One evening, however, I found a chance of escape, and you may be sure I was not slow to seize it. A window had been left a very little way open, but just enough to allow the passing of my slim body. In a second I was through, and with a beating heart I felt free, free once more, free as the night air, which blew so keenly upon me. I judged my distance from the ground with the greatest care, gathered myself up for a spring, and the next second I had made a long jump down into the street.

It was a very wet, cold, and windy winter's night, and I shivered as the heavy icy drops fell upon me.

"I rushed blindly forward."

Without waiting to consider, I rushed blindly forward, anywhere, anywhere to get away from that dreadful house. There was not much traffic in the streets, nor many people on the pavements, for it was very late. Once, at first, I thought I was followed, as heavy steps were swiftly running close behind me; but they suddenly

turned away and stopped in a doorway; and then I heard a policeman's whistle blown. Then a chimney-pot fell down and smashed just beside me. But I never stopped. On, on, scampering over large pools of water, over puddles, and banks of mud, sometimes



"I crept through the railing."

slipping and falling in the mire, running, jumping, tearing along through the never-ending streets. On, on I flew, over walls, across gardens, through gates, in the streets again, leaping gutters streaming with the rush of dirty water, until, panting, trembling, footsore, drenched, and bathed in mud, I crept through

the railing into the quiet of a deserted square, and then paused awhile to gain breath and collect my thoughts.

Glancing down at my aching feet, I hardly knew them for my own, for bespattered as I was I must have looked more like Black Peter than beautiful white Snowdrop ; and, as I thought of what Mother would think of it were she to see me, I could only mew aloud with shame and misery, and could think of nothing else but my poor cold body and my sorry plight.

But after I had cried until I felt too tired to cry any more, and the trees had kept me company by their drip—drip—dripping tears steadily all around me, I made up my mind that anything was better than to remain where I was. So I forced myself to think what had best be done. The dawn was just beginning to break in a dull gleam across the sky ; but my spirits drooped lower than ever as I thought of my position. This was indeed a desperate one. One thing I was quite sure of—that I would rather die at once than seek refuge at the Home for Lost Cats :

I had still some family pride left. Neither would I for all the world let Black Peter see me in my destitute condition—and now I had no home to offer him to share! Perhaps he would pity me, and perhaps he would despise me, and that I could not bear. My dear old corner by the fire was denied to me for ever—the savage Hero would take good care of that, and even now, no doubt, was jealously guarding it from any imaginable attempt of mine to return, and would hound me away with scorn had I dared to venture near. These thoughts turned me sick and faint, and I was seized with a fit of shivering. The more I thought on past and present things, the more remorseful and humble I became; and bravely and sadly putting all my vanity aside, as befitted my present condition, I at last made up my mind to go to Black Peter, beg him to try and recognise his poor Snowdrop, and give her, as usual, the benefit of his advice.

So, taking courage, I started off at once, but not so quickly now, I was so stiff and weary after my long

flight, which had been in a wrong direction, too, for my present plans, as I had had at first no thought but of escape. I went steadily on, making for our post-office, when, after a time, I was struck by a horrible thought, which brought me to a sudden standstill. I shouldn't find him, for he had made up his mind to leave his quarters! And in any case, he would be away by now, seeking high and low for his bride. However, I would go and make sure. The rain still beat pitilessly upon me, as, more hopeless and weary than ever, I started once more on my way. But I had become quite lame, and could limp but very slowly and painfully now.

When at last I reached the pond which is on the little common, not far from our post-office, the weather had changed and the sun was shining brightly. I was utterly exhausted, and as I stood for a moment wondering if after all I should be fortunate enough to find Black Peter in his usual haunts, I caught sight of my reflection in the water. It startled me nearly

out of my senses. For never had I seen such a miserable starved-looking dirty stray cat!—such as I never could have imagined that I could ever come to be. Surely, I thought, that can't possibly be Snowdrop? I was so dazed that I thought I was going to faint. I approached closer to the edge moaning, in my distress, "If that really is Snowdrop, it is impossible to seek help in such a plight."

As I looked again at the reflection, I suddenly saw a boy's head on each side of what evidently was my own, and to my terror, I felt myself roughly seized, and the next moment I was held up for inspection.

My heart sank. I mewed faintly and helplessly whilst my ears caught sounds of delight and satisfaction at my capture, and the awful talk of a plot concocted by my captors, to "drown the horrid stray cat, just to put the thing out of its misery." And without even raising a paw in self-defence, I bade adieu to all I loved. The next second I felt myself flying and whirling through the air, and then, with

a frightful splash I struck the icy-cold water and sank below its surface.

It happened, however, that where I dropped the water was not deep, and I found myself on my feet, more dead than alive, and, struggling more from instinct than desire, I made for the shore. I reached it only to find myself pounced upon once more by my tormentors. They knew, the cowards, that I had done them no harm, yet shouting with glee, "Let's throw her in again," this time they actually tied a heavy stone round my throat—and flung me away with much greater force than before. We were twisting round and round in the air, the stone and I, and I was waiting for the splash that was to end all my wretchedness, when I faintly heard one of them shout out, "Run, run! He means mischief!" and then I remembered no more—but the splash!

Chapter IV

WHEN I recovered consciousness, I found to my surprise that I was being carried gently by the neck, and then carefully laid down. I opened my eyes, and saw a great dog standing over me. It was Hero, who was licking my face and looking down anxiously at me!—or was I dreaming? No—it really was Hero—my old enemy as I thought him—Hero, dear old Hero, dripping wet from the tip of his sweet nose to the end of his darling tail. Then, for the first time, I noticed what a gentle face he had, and how kindly his great brown eyes could look. My heart was so full for the moment that I should have wept if I could, but I could not even mew my thanks. He seemed to understand, and, simply giving a satisfied grunt, he gently picked me up again, and trotting along quickly and carefully, he took me back to my old

home and laid me, all wet and faint and helpless from exhaustion, at the feet of dear little Mistress Elsie. Then he looked up at her and down at me—proudly wagging his tail. I tried to make him see how much remorse and love I felt, but I could not, I was so very weak, and nearly strangled by the stone.

You never could believe with what delight we were received. "How noble of him!" they cried. "Hero's brought her back," said Mistress Elsie; "it would be wicked to send her away again!" With that they all heartily agreed. I never shall forget how my pitiful condition aroused compassion and the kindness with which I was treated. How my rescuer was petted and called "a *real* Hero," at which I never heard him bark louder as he knocked me over with his wagging tail—it was a regular challenge to the neighbourhood. The stone was cut away from my neck; I was forgiven my past sins and, to my intense delight, Mistress Elsie's home was to be mine again from that day forth.

As soon as I could speak, and Hero and I were alone, I addressed the noble dog who had saved my life—

"Mr. St. Bernard, what you have done for me I shall never forget. You have returned good for evil. How can I tell you how ashamed I am of the way I treated you, and how can I hope to win your friendship and respect?"

All he replied was—"Don't say any more about that, Miss Snowdrop. Call me by my first name and we shall be the best of friends."

"I will," I said, "my Hero! My Hero" I repeated sadly, as I tried to lick away the mark of that old scratch on his lovely old nose, "I am mangy enough now, but indeed, indeed, I'm stuck-up no longer."

Chapter V

THE first news I learned was that poor Dicky was dead. I heard it with mingled feelings of sorrow and delight. It seemed really to lift a load from my mind, as I should no longer be open to temptation.

I was so carefully nursed and tended that I soon recovered my health and had become beautiful again and the envy of the neighbourhood before I dared to seek out Black Peter. Then I learned with grief that no one had seen him since I had gone—that he had left his home and left no address. I fretted very much at this, and blamed my incurable vanity for having waited so long before sending some friends to make the necessary inquiries as to his whereabouts.

At last one evening I found him, looking very black and glum, very thin and tired out. Our meeting was

a joyful one, and we talked the whole night through until the time for the cock to crow, telling one another our adventures. At first we were disturbed by a

"We are known to all the district as 'the happy family'"

window close by being opened and pieces of coal and wood hurled at us. It is quite surprising how rude some people can be when others are conversing.

And Black Peter was much perturbed when an old shoe nearly hit my head. So on his advice we moved out of reach. He listened throughout with many expressions of sympathy and concern to the story of my woes, and at the end asked for an introduction then and there to Hero. This took place with much ceremony and with many a really graceful bow by Black Peter. Black Peter had spent all his time, as I had guessed, in searching everywhere for me. But we forgot our troubles soon after, for the next day I became Mrs. Snowdrop Black Peter.

My dear Hero was best man, and is now godfather to our black-and-white kitten, which is named after him. We all live together, in the dear old home, where, upon my invitation and advice, Black Peter insisted on staying. We are known to all the district as "the happy family." Hero often shares our meals and he always takes part in our games. And we laugh heartily, because he is so clumsy and funny, and we have to hold our sides when he pretends to be vicious, while little Hero, who understands him so

well, playfully boxes his amiable nose by way of "How-d'you-do?"

Ah! Here they are—all three of them—come in to tea. MILK!!!

The Witch and the Jewelled Eggs

Chapter I

ONG, long ago, when the babbling brook had only just learnt to babble, and the daisies first knew they were called daisies, there lived a beautiful little Princess.

One summer's afternoon, as she roamed in the forest with her young cousin the Prince, they came to a strange-looking hut overgrown with ivy and yellow creepers. On the roof sat a black cat, which blinked first with one eye, which was green, and then with the other, which was blue. The small paved yard in front had at both ends a spring with

water-lilies floating on the sparkling surface, and between, an old Witch hobbled to and fro.

Suddenly she stopped and peered at the young couple.

"You are very sad," she said to them with a chuckle. "Own to it, own to it!"

"Yes, we *are* sad. You don't know how sad we are," they replied, and sighed heavily.

"Yes I do. I've been waiting for you this many a day. And now, of course, you have come to consult me. You want my help, I know," answered the Witch.

"No," said the Prince. "We never saw you or your hut before. But we are, indeed, in need of some one to help us."

"I knew it," she replied impatiently, to their surprise. "The King has refused his consent to your marriage." After a moment's thought she added: "Do you know why?"

"Because my father thinks we are too young," came shyly from the Princess.

"Not a bit of it," croaked the Witch, as she approached closer, pointing at them with her stick. "You are twelve years old, and he is twelve months older. Isn't twelve and twelve twenty-four? And isn't twenty-four old enough in this country, and at this time of day?" Her skinny shoulders shook as she laughed at her little joke. "But *I'll* tell you the real reason why. It's because the King has arranged that his pretty Princess is to marry my Lord High Duke. She is to be the bride of his friend and neighbour, don't you see? Ha! ha! ha! That is the real reason why! He! he!"

Then, with folded hands resting on her stick, she slowly nodded her head and looked on in silence at their grief at what she said. She watched them both narrowly, as they wrung their hands at their unhappy case.

"Ari-shoo-hoo!" sneezed the blinking cat on the roof, so loudly that it startled the Prince and Princess out of their distress.

"Now, listen, my honeys," said the Witch. "It

wants *me* to settle these little matters. Oh, you will soon own to that. You just do what I tell you, and the King shall pretty quickly give his consent, or my name isn't . . . Tra-la-la!" broke off the Witch—"Tra-la-la!"

Clink-clink went her iron-tipped, high-heeled shoes upon the stone pavement as they took her to the brink of the spring that was on the left. She looked back to see if they were watching her.

"Ari-shoo-hoo!" sounded again from the roof; and the Princess was fascinated as she watched those oddly moving eyes of the queer black cat, which held fast her gaze.

The Prince, however, was too engrossed to look up, for he saw that the Witch, with her back towards him, was leaning on her stick, her head bent forward, intently watching her own reflection. Soon the water-lilies began to move restlessly; and then, suddenly, right through the heart of the largest bloom there jutted forth a high spray of silver drops, from which she quickly filled a little crystal bowl.

Turning to the Princess and handing it to her, the Witch said slowly—

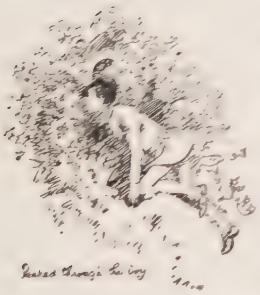
"Turning to the Princess and handing it to her."

"My dearie, mix this silvern fluid secretly with the King's white wine. He will then grant the wish of both of you. But woe to you," she added, and

shook her shrivelled forefinger in warning, "if this bowl is not kept full until the hour arrives for the King to drink."

And she sent them on their way.

Chapter II



SO they walked on very slowly for fear of spilling a drop of the precious draught, and they chatted as they went.

"Whoever can she be?" said the young girl. "She can speak kindly and act kindly, too, for now we shall be as happy as we could wish. I never before saw such a beautiful drink as this! See how it sparkles now the sun shines on it. Where could she have got it?"

"I don't like her ugly look," replied the boy shortly.

"Nonsense, that's because she's old. But I couldn't bear the sight of that horrid cat!" and she glanced around nervously in fear at the thought of it.

"Don't be frightened, dear. I'll protect you." And he put his arm around her neck and led her gently on.

It was getting late when they had to part. The Prince watched his sweetheart out of sight: but instead of going to his home, he straightway retraced his steps and hurried to the hut. He approached stealthily from the back, and, creeping softly, carefully hiding, he peeped round the corner through the thick ivy.

What he saw and heard made him quail, brave as he was, and his heart thumped as it had never thumped before.

There sat the Witch on the three-legged stool in front of her open door, gleefully rubbing her hands together, and laughing out aloud. Her face was flushed a deep red, like the colour of the setting sun.

At last in a shrill voice she called—

"Nemesis! Come here, my beauty!"

Slowly and with stately step the blinking black cat appeared at his mistress's summons, swinging

his tail to the right and left so that it kept time to the winking of his eyes—and to his measured tread.

"Now don't sneeze even if you want to," said the Witch, "and attend to me."

Black Nemesis jumped on to her shoulder, cocked his head on one side, and gave a wise blink with both eyes together. Then he listened.

"We haven't much power at present," continued the Witch. "We've only got the Silver Spring, the Golden Spring, and the Black Sprinkle—my Nem brews the Black Sprinkle so beautifully in his cosy chimney, that I am sure he has some always ready?" she added in a coaxing voice.

The cat purred and licked her face with his forked red tongue.

"Right!" said the Witch. "But you know you would be powerless to make it without me. It wants *me* to settle these little matters. Remember that, and own to it—always own to it. We know what we know, don't we, Nem? But only wait till to-morrow

day," she continued, "for then the King will have drunk the Silver Drops, and I shall have him in my power. Ha! ha! He! he! he!" She rubbed her bony hands on her knees in exultation. "And what do you think his ransom will have to be? Why, as many of his Jewelled Eggs as will fill my hut! Then do you know what I shall do? Of course you don't. Well, I shall exchange them one by one for the secret spells of every witch around. And thus, pretty one, I shall become Queen-witch. And—and then—now see what a clever mistress you have got—with so much power, when I have it, I shall force them to give me back all the Eggs again. And then," she croaked, jumping up, flushed still deeper with thoughts of coming triumph, and brandishing her stick above her head, "I shall be richer than the King himself! *I* shall be ruler of all the land!—At last!! Ah! I've waited long for this—long, indeed!"

Then, with a chuckle, she clutched the cat from her shoulder, held him high in front of her, and saying, "So! Now you've heard the news, you know what

you have to do. Go!"—she flung him inside the hut.

The sun set and the Witch, still chuckling, hobbled indoors.

Chapter III

HE Prince waited no longer, but sped away through the forest in the gathering darkness.

After what he had heard, everything around him looked grim and weird. He felt, too, as though he were being pursued, and ran fast, and still faster. But the trees and brambles seemed to step in his way to stop him. He often had to halt as they rent his clothes and scratched his face and hands. Sometimes they tripped him up, and sometimes they caught him by the hair.

Yet he went bravely on, looking eagerly on every side for a glimpse of the Princess's white dress. For he remembered how slow and tiring her progress must

be, having to carry the full bowl so carefully ; and he hoped that he could not now be far from her. " Would he be in time ? " he wondered. " Could she possibly have arrived and carried out the Witch's bidding ? " These thoughts tormented him as he saw no trace of her, and they spurred him on his quest.

" The King *must* be saved," he panted as he ran, " and *I* will save him and the Treasure, too," said the Prince aloud. His strength was by this time nearly gone ; yet his handsome face was set and determined. His fine clothes were all tattered and torn, but he never noticed it. On he flew.

* * * * *

Now, as everybody knew, the King's Treasure consisted of hundreds of Jewelled Easter Eggs, which formed the regalia, all made of gold and precious stones.

It had been the custom from time immemorial for the happy subjects to present their ruler with a Jewelled Egg every Easter day, amid general rejoicings. A dozen of those he liked the most he wore, as

a sign of sovereignty, hanging from a diamond chain around his neck.

These Eggs were useful as well as ornamental. Each one could be opened and it contained something that had never been seen or thought of before: such as a watch that told the time in a bell-like voice when pressed to do so; or a small barometer which foretold the weather for every day of the next week, so that such a thing as a shower flow during a flower show was then unknown in that fortunate country.

During the twelve months the people would put their heads and wits together to find out some wonderful fancy or scientific novelty for the coming Easter. This year every one was very pleased, for they had presented to their well-loved King a Jewelled Egg that was an astonishing success. It was made of opal, set round with emeralds and rubies, and held a tiny hen which cackled loudly every morning, and, as the opal flew open, raised itself and flapped its wings, revealing a freshly laid egg, which grew bigger and bigger till

it was ready for the Royal breakfast. It was very ingenious.

* * * * *

At last the Prince spied the little Princess amongst the trees of the huge Forest, just where the brook, babbling breathlessly to the daisies, turned in its course in a great half-circle ; and, before she had time to know what he was doing, he had seized the crystal bowl from her grasp and dashed it on the ground. The scattered contents immediately shrivelled up the grass, and glittered there like dew in the moonlight.

" Oh, dear ! Woe to us ! " cried the Princess when she saw what he had done.

" It is evil witch-stuff ! " replied the Prince, as soon as he could get out the words. " It would have been ' Woe to ' your father if he had drunk it, and no happiness to us. Come, let us rest under this big tree, and I will tell you all about it."

So they sat down beneath the oak. He leaned back against the trunk of it, and told the Princess his amazing tale. He told her all—all that he had seen

and heard, and when he had finished she felt afraid, and crept closer to him. Then they held counsel together, and he soothed her fears, so brave and wise was he. But soon their eager voices were hushed, and the weary little travellers, tired from their wandering and strange adventure, fell fast asleep.

Chapter IV

THE rising wind sang and whistled through the trees. The leaves danced as before a storm, and the boughs creaked with an ugly sound. But another sound uglier still came quickly.

"Ari-shoo-hoo!"

They woke with a start, and were on their feet before they knew that they were awake. For there in front of them, in the ring of moonlight, stood the Witch binding together the twigs of a broomstick, and muttering angrily as she worked. Whilst round her, with stately tread, crept the blinking cat.

"How now, Princess," snarled she with an evil

smile as their eyes met : " Why do you tarry so late ? What is that which sparkles at your feet ? "

" It is evil witch-stuff," replied the bold Prince.

She did not heed him, but raising her angry voice higher and higher she screamed out, " So you have disobeyed me ! Own to it ! You have broken my crystal bowl ! Woe to you ! "

" Woe to you ! " moaned back the great trees of the Forest.

The children clung tightly together, and the crackling trees around bent and swayed. Then the Witch drew forth something from under her cloak, and hobbling around them and squirting Black Sprinkle upon them, she uttered

The Incantation.

" So ho ! You've disobeyed me !
Woe to you !
The Spell my cunning made me
Show to you—
My orders—you resist all,
You've broke my vase of crystal—
Woe to you, Prince and Princess,
Woe to you !

To punish you I now do
So to you!
My curse is but a *Quid pro*
Quo to you!
Woe to you, woe to you!

"The King still has his Treasure—
Own to it!
Your life shall have no pleasure
Known to it
While the King is in possession
Thro' the Prince's bold transgression—
Groan to it!
You've saved him from my power—
Small pride to you!
She shall not be an hour
A bride to you.
Nor e'en the Lord High Duke shall know
As long as Wind shall sigh and blow,
As long as Sun shall shine and glow
All help is now denied to you!

Now, Princess, take a coat of snow—
You, Prince, a beard that e'er shall grow
From ugly chin to uglier toe,
With bandied legs and furrowed wrinkle,
On you I pour the dread Black Sprinkle
Brewed for the King—
Behold, the thing
Is by my spell applied to you!

To punish you I now do
So to you!
My curse is but a *Quid pro*
Quo to you!
Woe to you, woe to you!"

Thereupon, as the last words were chanted out, and seemed to wind themselves around their victims, the Princess changed suddenly into a lovely white pony, with pink satin trappings, embroidered with pearls —for her beauty was so great that it could not be stolen from her even by witchcraft. Holding the pretty creature by a rope of turquoises stood an ugly old gnome with a long white beard—the hideous shape into which the Witch had transformed the unlucky Prince!

Then screamed the beldame, in shrill, cracked tones—

The Enchantment.

"Till Pony's mane exchanges place
With beard upon the Gnome's great face—
The face of the Ugly Gnome,
No man shall see the Prince's grace,
Nor Princess rest in his embrace,
Nor gladden eyes at home.
But he with antic and grimace,

And she with Pony's pretty pace,
The pair at will shall roam.
No more their voices interlace,
Be they treble, be they bass,
For the Sprinkle's Spell is on them both,
And Witch's Spell is Witch's Oath!"

For a moment there was a dreadful silence, while the unfortunate victims stood trembling, then the summer storm which had been gathering all the while burst with a crash, and the Witch was seen on her broomstick, with Nemesis perched upon the broom behind her, riding away through the wind; and her cries of rage were drowned in the growl of the angry thunder.

* * * * *

The gnome, leading the pony, wandered about all the night through, for they had lost their way and could not tell whither to turn.

With the dawn, the Forest took back its usual look Proud cockatoos flew around, or sat chatting together about their family crests; and monkeys, grimacing and gibbering, scampered amongst the trees and excitedly discussed the coming Darwinian theory.

Soon the two enchanted ones perceived in the distance, shining like a beacon in the bright sunlight, the royal Palace of glass. In the centre of it could be

"The Witch was seen on her broomstick."

seen the treasure chamber with the Jewelled Easter Eggs heaped up in a glorious mass, which flashed forth all the colours of the rainbow in every direction.

The whole palace, indeed, looked as if it were built of rainbow, and by that name—the Rainbow Palace—it was known.

There was a noise of many horses and of clanking armour, and then the gnome and the white pony saw the King riding slowly towards them at the head of his brilliant train.

Chapter V

ON the night before, whilst the Prince and Princess were tasting of the Witch's power, the King, sorely troubled at his daughter's absence, had sent scouts round about in search of her. All the night long he had sat and gazed into the moonlight watching and waiting, his face grave and pale with anxiety. No news had come, for every messenger must have lost his way, and no one sent out that night returned until late on the morrow.

As the first streak of dawn tinged the sky, the weary King himself rode forth with his attendants, as we have seen, in quest of his daughter. He knew that of late she and his nephew were sad ; but he had smiled when he had heard of their youthful impatience to be married, and had bid them wait a short while longer.

It was a bright morning, the sun shone gaily, birds were singing, and all the animal world was happy, as the King and his retinue came to the curve of the

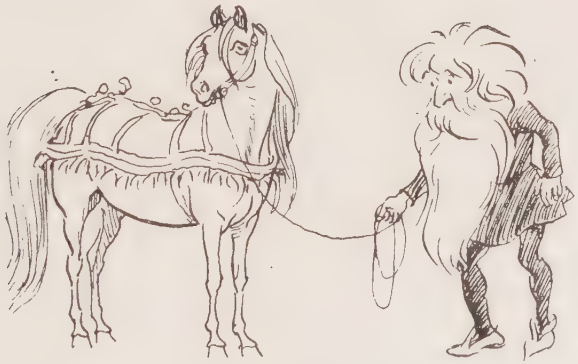
He was about to drink.

brook and the daisies. There they dismounted, and standing close to their horses they listened, for strange noises were in the air. On a patch of

shrivelled grass the morning dew seemed to glisten strangely. It looked so refreshing that the King, heated by his ride, stooped and gathered some of it in the palm of his hand. He was about to drink, when he suddenly stopped, for the noises were now connected sounds, and were borne upon the ears of all around like a distant echo of words clearly uttered. The King and his followers listened; and it was the voices of the cockatoos which were screaming out the lines of the Incantation which they had overheard; and then the monkeys piped back the Enchantment in thoughtless glee!

Then all was confusion once more, and there followed a deep silence. The King staggered back, and would have fainted, but his attendants carried him to the brook, whose sweet water quickly restored him. Soon, as they rode homewards, he learned how an old Witch had been seen near by, and he knew it must be she who had used her wicked spells. He understood what fate had befallen his loved ones, and how the Witch had tricked them with her cunning lies.

Slowly and dejectedly the brilliant cavalcade proceeded, the King deep in thought, his head bent forward in sorrow, his pointed grey beard drooping on his breast, as the tears coursed down his cheeks. Suddenly he was aroused by a low whinny. He



looked up and saw standing in his path a beautiful white pony held by an ugly little gnome. They gazed at him with the eyes of dumb creatures. Then shaking above his head his Royal fist, he cried out his

Royal Curse.

"Now down upon the Wicked Witch
Descend my Royal bitter curse!

May all her days be dark as pitch!
And though she ever slave and stitch,
Never may the hag be rich!
But poor, and ill—then worse, and worse,
Come well within my Royal curse!"

In front of the Rainbow Palace he installed the gentle pony, where he could see it always, in a bower of roses, and he spread all kinds of tempting food before it. But the poor creature for a long while refused to eat, and sank down exhausted upon its sweet soft bed of rose leaves. So he set a guard of soldiers round about, whilst the faithful gnome stretched himself on the ground across the entrance to the bower.

The King then withdrew to his thinking chamber, known as the Brown Study, and he remained there all alone. And no one dared to disturb the great scholar when he went there to wrap himself up in profound thought and a purple dressing gown.

When they heard what had befallen the Prince and Princess, the whole countryside wept for their King in his sorrow. They searched everywhere for the

"Putting their heads together"

Witch so that they might burn her hut, wherever it might be, and might revenge themselves upon her, but neither the one nor the other could they find. She seemed to have vanished, and was seen no more, and as for her hut, not a single trace of it was anywhere to be found, although every one took part in the anxious search for it.

After a while they braced themselves for action, and began putting their heads together in order to find how the enchantment could be undone before the coming Easter, with the intention of presenting the solution inside the new Jewelled Egg. So they held meetings and discussions, and they talked and argued and thought, till the months had slipped by before they realized they had gone.

When Eastertide arrived, their imagination had brought them no further than the silly suggestion to cut off the mane and beard, exchange them, and glue them on; and so exasperated did they become at their want of success that, in their vexation and despair, quarrels and even riots took place. The

people, indeed, became so hopelessly empty-headed in their anxiety, that when the auspicious day arrived, it came about that they had thought of no great scheme for a new Jewelled Egg at all, and consequently they had nothing better to present to their sorrowing Sovereign than a common, every-day great auk's egg, which he was too miserable to notice.

He even thanked them as usual, and graciously gave the usual order for its removal to the Treasure Chamber. Nor did he ever know that as the Lord High Duke was carrying it thither he dropped it—perhaps purposely—so that it was broken and thrown away. But so afraid were his Dukeship and the people that the King might have had a glimpse of it, and so be reminded of their only failure, that they set out and killed all the great auks they could find.

Perhaps that is why great auks' eggs are now so very expensive.

Chapter VI

THE fact is that from continually pondering on how to make the Royal White Pony's mane change place with the gnome's beard, the King had become strangely absent-minded, and he interested himself no more in things in general. So much so. that one morning, being more confused than usual, he dismissed his gentlemen of the bed chamber too soon. Five minutes later he found to his astonishment that he had combed his beard (which had become long and white) instead of his long white locks; and that instead of shaving his upper lip, which he always preferred to do himself, he had shaved every hair off his head.

"*My* mistake!" he muttered.

Now this act led to great things. The Royal head became remarkably cool, and on the evening of the very same day, the King issued the following extraordinary proclamation:—

"*Whosoever shall restore my dearly beloved daughter and nephew to their proper shapes, shall receive from my Treasure Chamber one dozen times the Royal White Pony's weight in my far-famed Jewelled Eggs.*"

Early the next morning after the edict had gone forth, the Witch appeared at the great glass gates of the Rainbow Palace and demanded audience of the King. She was recognized at once, and was quickly seized and bound.

The King showed no surprise on hearing of her arrival. He sallied forth and ordered his guards to set her free. She looked very evil as she stood there panting, breathless, and resentful.

"Speak!" commanded the King, and all the people gathered round.

"'*My* mistake!' he muttered."

"I alone can restore the Princess and the Prince to you," exclaimed the Witch, pointing at him with her finger. "It takes *me* to settle these little matters!" she added with a sneer. "High and mighty as your Royalship thinks yourself to be, my mind is greater and cleverer far than yours. See how I have plunged you and your whole country in such woe that you are helpless against it and me!"

The crowd made a rush forward with angry faces and clenched fists to avenge the insult.

But the King stayed them with a gesture, and said sternly—

"Silence, woman! Do not boast of your love of doing evil. Say briefly what brings you here."

"Your Jewelled Eggs bring me here. Your Proclamation brings me here. There! Read this bond and sign it."

He took from her a black scroll and flask of red ink. Then the Witch, firmly planting her staff upon the ground with her outstretched hand, her whole attitude

one of insolent scorn, watched the King as he read aloud the bond :—

"*I hereby agree to pay to the great Witch, when her marvellous genius shall have accomplished the Act of Restoration, Jewelled Eggs in accordance with the exact terms contained in my Royal Proclamation.*"

He opened one of the Eggs on his diamond chain, took from it a telephonographic penholder, whispered to it, and laid it on the parchment. All by itself it stood up on its nib ; it drank of the red ink ; and by itself it wrote the Royal signature to the deed as it had been commanded. The pen was replaced in its egg and the scroll given back to the Witch. His Majesty did not seem particularly angry or unhappy or hopeful, or anything ; yet the corners of his mouth curved upwards for a second before he resumed his grave demeanour.

Throwing back her head, and pointing with her long crutch-stick, the Witch said—

"Now, before we proceed any further, show all

these nice people, who are so fond of you, how you can do homage to your betters. Down—upon your knees."

At this there arose such a howl of execration from the populace that only by the quiet order of the King to the soldiers on guard did she escape the heavy blows aimed at her. Again he had raised his hand and stayed the tumult. Then with dignity he obeyed the Witch once more; and the astonished assembly saw him stoop low before the old hag, and humbly make obeisance. Never had the venerable Monarch seemed nobler or more serene than at this moment, in the devoted act of a father's sacrifice.

The Witch, shrivelled and bent once more, turned round and slowly moved away. Looking back over her shoulder, and beckoning to them, she rasped out--

"Come now, all of you, and see me carry out the bargain! It wants *me* to settle these little matters! You'll own to it! Come, follow me to the Forest--you two Bewitched Ones! He! he! His humble Royalship! The brave retinue! And the gentle

crowd! Come, see what *I* can do! Follow me!"

The retinue objected, and implored their Sovereign not to venture after her. But the pony and the gnome had already started, so that the King, in order to keep them in view, unhesitatingly strode forward. The retinue were thus forced to follow, which they did in some fear, though sustained by the ever-increasing train of followers.

Curiosity grew keener at every step, and the crowd grew bigger and bigger. Thus, after a time, the long procession arrived at a remote part of the Forest, where stood the hut they had never seen before, covered with withered ivy and poisonous-looking creepers, making a desolate and mournful show under the overcast sky. They grouped themselves as close as they could around the King and his attendants. They stood in front of the paved court, and the water-lily-covered springs, and spread far back into the Forest and among the trees. All were on tiptoe of expectation, and breathless with wonder and excitement.

Chapter VII

THEN they saw the Witch make sign to the gnome to stand with the pony in front of the right-hand spring, before she withdrew inside her hut.

Soon they heard in her shrill voice the chant of

The Golden Haze.

'Tis only in the Golden Haze
  Can beard and mane their place exchange:
And only by my secret ways—
  My ways so weird and wise and strange.

'Tis I who make the Golden Haze,
  Wherein I may undo a spell;
And then 'tis only when it pays—
  Whene'er it's clear 'twill pay me well.

Behold me weave the Golden Haze!
Now look with your intensest gaze—
  The transformation must be wrought!
(Yet no one here my word obeys,
So fierce and dazzling is the blaze—
Like sunshine in the hottest days,
  When eyesight can distinguish nought!)

Now look into my Golden Haze,
And when you hear the gnome's loud voice,
And when the snow-white pony neighs,
The transformation's done—Rejoice!

'Tis now the time! Behold, I raise
At my command, the Golden Haze!

Before their astonished sight, a cloud of shimmering gold had risen slowly from the water-lilies, and enveloped the pony and the gnome, and hid them quite from view. It became so brilliant, so blinding, that the spectators were forced to shade their eyes. But only for a moment. They looked again. A hoarse shout and sweet whinny resounded through the Forest, and the Golden Haze suddenly fell in a cascade of liquid gold back into the lilies' spring, revealing the Princess and Prince standing, restored, together hand in hand, grown a year taller, a year handsomer, and a year happier!

The King opened wide his arms, and amidst the joyous hurrahs from the delighted multitude, he clasped the children to his breast, and hugged them close as he bent and kissed them.

Just then the Witch, whom for a moment every one had forgotten, came hurrying forward with the blinking black cat perched high on the great brim of her hat.

"The Jewelled Eggs!" she demanded eagerly. "Quick, quick! Give me the Jewelled Eggs!"

"Softly!" replied the King. "I promised them to twelve times the weight of the Royal White Pony, did I not?"

"Yes, yes, according to your Royalship's signature here. I've got it. On the bond."

"Softly!" repeated the King. "What is its weight? The Royal White Pony is no longer here to be weighed. Do you grasp that fact, hag? Dear, dear," he continued in a bantering tone, "Wherever can that White Pony be?" and then he frankly smiled.

The people understood him at last, and the plot he had devised; and they laughed and scoffed, and mocked, and jeered, and laughed again, whilst the Witch stood there powerless, rooted to the spot with

astonishment, her face livid and her teeth chattering as if with cold. Then, seeing that she was beaten—powerless and quivering with rage — while the cat, with his back high arched, spat defiance at the seething crowd, she yelled out, "Wait! Only wait!" Glaring malignantly at them, she turned to go indoors. But she had made but a single step in that direction when she threw up her hands, and started horror-stricken like the crowd itself. For, by reason of the Black Sprinkle being no longer under control, it exploded in the hut with a terrific noise. Smoke and flames belched out of the building, setting it on fire and crackling furiously among the ivy.

Then out of the chimney spurted a black, bubbling, frothing liquid which gushed down and round about, destroying and covering everything within reach, as it spread and spread in a streaming flow. Nearly the whole hut was now ablaze.

In the breathless silence that followed there came on the breeze the voices of the screaming cockatoos—

"Now down upon the Wicked Witch
Descends the Royal bitter curse!"

And the monkeys gibbered back—

"The Sprinkle Black is black as pitch,
But tastes and smells and burns much worse!"

Then the voices of the cockatoos and monkeys mingled together, uttering in discordant tones—

"Curst be the Witch, no longer rich,
Without a farthing in her purse.
The curse has worked without a hitch—
The honoured King's most Royal curse!"

The Witch shuddered, and tottered into the burning building. The next moment she appeared on the roof amidst the smoke and flames, with the blinking black cat clinging to her shoulder. She mounted astride her broomstick, and yelling out threats of coming vengeance, she jumped upwards into space.

A shriek rent the air. Down came the Witch and her Nemesis, and fell with a thud upon the court below; and they never stirred.

For the first time the Witch had been outwitted.

She who thought herself so wise had been beaten throughout the whole scheme, and so had lost all power for ever. But, although she had suddenly realized it, she would not bring herself to "own to it."

The inky stream flowed on and on, obliterating everything in its course. The people fled in all directions to escape, rushing madly away for safety; and the King, dragged by the hand by the Prince and Princess, ran nearly as fast as the rest, and far more merrily.

When they looked again at the spot, no hut was there. Nothing was left of all that they had seen. Only the sameness of the Forest—great trees everywhere, as though nothing else had ever been. Yet they saw an object lying there on that bald black patch of ground. They approached, and found it was nothing more than an old broomstick. But for all that there was nobody who had a fancy to have it, nor could any one be found even to touch it.

The Court returned to the Palace, and the people

THE KING RAN NEARLY AS FAST AS THE REST AND FAR MORE MERRILY

went homewards, singing blithely after the great events of the day.

"I think it took *me* to settle that little matter!" remarked the King, with a jovial smile.

* * * * *

There lay the old broomstick, and the people from all around the country would come and look at it, and hear from those who had been eye-witnesses all about the Witch and the Jewelled Eggs. Then they would laugh and extol their King for his wisdom: and they were thankful for their many blessings.

One day the wonderful report got about that the old broomstick was sprouting. And in truth it had actually taken root and was shooting young leaves. Then it developed into a big, bushy plant with beautiful yellow blossoms along its slender rod-like stems, and all around it was a sweet scent, and there arose the hum of many bees.

So the people, knowing as they did, that it sprang from a broomstick, called it "Broom," and soon the whole countryside was bright and gay with this new

bush which had never been seen before. And to this day it flourishes plentifully all over the land, which it beautifies with its growth.

Now, when all the broom was in full blossom, preparations for the Royal wedding were finished. For in the meantime the King had not forgotten what he owed to the brave young Prince, whom he now loved to honour in every way. And that he might hear his lovely daughter say that she had not one wish left unfulfilled, he forthwith gave her to the Prince for bride.

So the wedding took place in the great Rainbow Palace, amid much pomp and circumstance. And the King blessed his daughter's marriage with the Prince, and every one rejoiced in their happiness.

Muriel and the Fire-King

Chapter I

HOW IT BEGAN

IN a high house in Carlton Gate there is a large drawing-room, so unusually large that on a certain cold winter's evening the little girl who was there alone looked quite lost in it. Muriel was very small for her age; to her, therefore, the high ceiling seemed higher still, and the furniture as though it were made for giants. The huge fireplace, with its depth of glowing fire before which she stood and warmed her hands, seemed to her, as she peered into it, like some vast country, as mysterious as the moon or the starlit sky.

It was bitterly cold and cheerless outside, with the snow lying thick on the ground—in speaking contrast with this great brilliantly lighted room. The spoilt little lady was sitting up so that she might come

down to dessert. It was Christmas Eve, and she was to join the grand grown-up party downstairs; and, for a while, Muriel was left alone in solitary glory.

She looked round in all the mirrors in turn, and what she saw met with her entire approval—a short white silk frock, with stockings and shoes to match, and a string of pearls round her slender throat. She paid no heed to what was much prettier, to the pale, delicately oval face, framed in the wavy mass of golden auburn hair—a shade so rarely seen—glossy and beautiful, and tied at the side with a white bow. With her thoughtful dark eyes she looked only at the little bending figure that curtsied to itself from the glass. Then she smiled and lifted daintily a silken fold in each hand, and danced gracefully down the whole length of the big saloon, until she found herself rather breathless before the fireplace again.

Then she grew serious, and sank down upon the large soft tiger skin spread in front of the marble fender, and yawned. She glanced up at the great gilt clock

ticking solemnly on the mantelpiece, and seeing how late it was she yawned again, and began to wish she had not quite so long to wait to go downstairs.

"How foolish of me!" thought Muriel all of a sudden. "I've forgotten about Santa Claus! I know what I'll do, I'll lie on the rug and watch and

"'Would you like a ride?' whispered the tiger."

catch him at last. What fun it would be to see him coming tumbling down!" She tried, on all fours, to peer up the chimney, but she could see nothing there except the huge forked flames that roared and frolicked ever so far up.

So Muriel lay full length on the warm fur, her cheek

resting against the grim stuffed head of the tiger, while her eyes followed the flickering tongues of the fire. They were doing odd things now, those flames: jumping up and down. Then suddenly a coal, with a hissing noise in an unexpected place, would spurt a little jet of yellow fire, which turned to blue, and as suddenly disappeared in a tiny puff of smoke. Those flames, too, would have a romping game of hide-and-seek together, which looked great fun, bolting in and out so quickly, that it was almost impossible for the eye to follow them.

And then the room seemed to grow dim and dark.

Chapter II

A RIDE ON THE TIGER

"WOULD you like a ride?" whispered the tiger in Muriel's ear, and she felt that his body was sleek and sinewy, like that of her own white cat.

"Yes, please," she answered, rather surprised, as she raised herself sideways.

"Then hold on by my fur. That's right. Now we're off!"

Saying this, the tiger gathered himself together, and with an easy, bounding movement he jumped right over a wall made of marble, over a tessellated court, straight between some iron railings—without awakening two formidable guardian dogs asleep with their eyes open—and landed on what looked like a valley of cinders with high mountains and volcanoes all round.

"Are you all right?" he inquired, as he lay down

and turned his head round to satisfy himself of that fact.

"Yes, thank you," answered the astonished Muriel, panting for breath. "How you can jump! Dear me! Wherever are we?"

"In the Fire-King's Domain."

"How did I get here?"

"We jumped, didn't you notice, through the iron boundaries into the fire."

"What horrid smuts there are everywhere!"

"That's because we are in the suburbs known as the Black Country."

She got off his back, and stood shaking her frock. Then she gazed ruefully above and around her, and said: "Why, it seems to be raining smuts!" As indeed it was.

"Haven't you brought an umbrella with you, or a parasol, or something?" asked the tiger.

"No, I never thought it would rain," replied Muriel disconsolately. She glanced at the blacks settling on her, and felt inclined to cry.

"Oh, you mustn't, you know," he said; "it always rains like that here, but never really spoils anything. Come, I'll soon take you out of this. I promised you a ride, and I always keep my promises."

He gave such a funny, knowing wink that she was obliged to laugh. Muriel had always liked him, but now she felt that they were warm friends.

"I'm sure it is most kind of you," she replied, settling herself comfortably, "and I'm very much obliged. I've never ridden a tiger before. But, please tell me, how is it I'm not burnt?"

"Because *I* brought you here."

"And you? Why aren't you burnt either?"

"Because I am the King's messenger, and I wear a fireproof coat specially made for Fireland—fits me like a skin. I'm the head of the regiment of Tigers," he added proudly, "and I bring his Majesty news of all that goes on in the front. I'm always backwards and forwards. In the drawing-room you see me lying low, downtrodden and apt to be sat upon; but when young people are asleep they don't always see what goes

on. You know something different now, and you'll know a great deal more soon. Now we really must be getting on faster, or else we shan't be in time for dessert."

After a pause he added to reassure her, as she remained silent—

"You won't get burnt; and you needn't be afraid. But other children will, I can tell them, when they go too near the fire, if they haven't patience to wait for *me*. Never since the world began has it ever been possible to enter Fairy Fireland except on the back of a tiger; and the story of such a ride as you are having has never been told before, so far as I know."

"Hasn't it, Ti dear?" answered Muriel dreamily, adding: "*I* think we must be in Pompeii," with a wise toss of her pretty head.

"You don't know *where* you are, that's clear. You are on my back in Fireland, so don't let me have to say it again." He smiled so that she should not think he was cross.

Muriel wondered at seeing no one about, and won-

dered still more at the explanation that it was too far north for the inhabitants to live in such cold.

"Shall we find it *very* hot where they are?" she inquired nervously.

"Bless you, no. We're bound to get there gradu-

"The tiger never stopped, but glided on with his precious burden."

ally." And the tiger looked round at her as he asked: "Which do you prefer—warmth or coolth?"

"Warmth in winter, of course," answered Muriel. "But now it seems to be getting rather stufficating."

"You'll very soon be used to that," he replied. She found she had become so already, even before he

could say "Jack Sprat!" which he wasn't going to.

The tiger never stopped, but glided on with his precious little burden; and their spirits rose with the temperature.

Suddenly the tiger halted and said, "Look!"

And, in the far distance, Muriel saw a glorious mass of red light, so dazzlingly bright that at first she had to shade her eyes with her hand until they became accustomed to the glare. Then she dismounted, and slipped her arm round the tiger's neck as she gazed. She could distinguish, in the red light, shining houses and lofty towers, turrets and glowing palaces, whilst high above all arose a magnificent castle, around which there flowed a moat of liquid fire that rose and fell in golden billows.

"Oh, how lovely!" murmured Muriel, with suppressed excitement. "Who lives in that wonderful castle?"

"The Fire-King."

"What's his name?"

"He's known as King Coal the Grate."

"Why? Tell me why, Ti dear."

"Because he has defied the whole Smoke Abatement Movement, *and* the Damper, *and* the Register, *likewise* Jack Frost."

"Does he live all alone?"

"Oh dear, no! He lives with his son and his Court. I'm going to take you there, and present you."

She clapped her hands with glee. Suddenly she saw a puff of smoke and blue flame, followed by a little explosion; then more.

"Is there a battle going on?" asked Muriel, startled.

"There always has been war, and there always will be war. But you needn't be alarmed; the firing isn't aimed at us."

"With whom, then, is he at war?"

"With no one. There's no one to be at war with."

"I don't understand." Another puff, and a report went off bang.

"Does each time that happens mean some one's

killed ? " asked Muriel, now getting mixed in her anxiety.

" Oh dear, no ! Each of those bangs represents a joke of Merry King Coal. He is rather puffed up about them, but sometimes they don't go off. Then, for a moment his coalship looks wretched and depressed. Then he thinks of the Smoke Abatement people, who worry him to consume his own smoke from his pipe. As though he ever could ! "

" Of course he ever couldn't," rejoined Muriel.

" But, generally," added the tiger, " the young sparks carry his jokes right out of the country."

" Where to ? "

" Where they catch on and burn in with a smell of singeing, unless they are guarded against."

" How can that be managed ? " interrupted Muriel.

" Fire-guards, of course they act towards scorchers as guard'ans of the piece of carpet."

" Is scorching against the law here, too ? "

But the tiger was too intent on what he was relating to be switched off further. He went on.

"Then the King laughs with delight at their being such a fine draw. Oh, yes, our old King Coal is a merry old soul."

"I've always heard that."

"Have you?" replied the loyal tiger. "I'm glad of that, for then you understand that his Majesty's reputation is no invention of mine. Every one knows that, but every one doesn't know what you are going to see and hear, because you are the first little mortal to pay him a real, live visit. You'll be famous!"

Muriel felt very proud; she kissed the tiger, who, besides being kindly, flattered himself he was rather a wag.

"His coalship just loves to let off a joke with a crack like the report of a roasting chestnut—see?—and sometimes even risks getting his own head cracked over it. Bless you, those jokes o' his are killing enough sometimes!" Muriel felt puzzled all over.

The tiger peered into her face, and muttered: "We

really shall not be in time for dessert." So she mounted, and they started off again.

Before long, they arrived in the heart of the City of Fire.

Chapter III

KING COAL'S CASTLE

THERE was plenty of noise in the brilliantly lighted streets, as Muriel passed through them at a trot on the back of the tiger. Such queer little folk they were, too, who were hurrying about, dressed in scarlet from top to toe, their ruddy faces peeping through scarlet hoods, which ended all in the same style, in a high peak and tassel. These hoods were worn only by the fashionable people, who preferred to hide their black hair—for the royal hair was red, and that was the only colour allowed in the Fire-King's dominions to followers of the Royal house.

Everything was red—the sky above was lurid, the buildings were red ; the gaily painted carts and quaint little carriages ; even the ponies, the cats, and the dogs all shone red in the general glare.

A great deal of building was going on, too, done by little black people, in black tunics striped with yellow.

"Those are the Coals," explained the tiger. "They emigrate into Fireland as slaves, shovelling their way in, and pushing themselves all over the place. They turn red all over in time—except their black hair—and then they are set free, and are allowed to dress like the rest of the inhabitants."

"Please tell me some more about them," said Muriel, greatly interested.

"Well, as they grow old and worn, they become grey and hoary. The King hates cinders, so when they turn cindery his coalship throws them out of his dominions, fires jokes at them, and that kills them. It was over their cinder path we had to travel, so you see they have to scuttle somehow."

"Do they mind?"

"Sometimes they do, and then there's a brush with them."

Muriel's thoughts harked back. "What makes them turn red all over?" she asked.

"The heat, or scarlet infection; merely a matter of choice."

Above all the hubbub, an occasional crash was heard, as of an earthquake in the far distance, followed by a dull rumble and roaring; while the firing continued at intervals. Some of the streets were quiet, and dimly lighted. Soon they went through a narrow passage with high black walls on each side, and then a broad stairway rose straight up in front of them.

"Now for a getting upstairs," exclaimed the tiger cheerfully. And with his four legs he went up four at a time (which Muriel calculated must make sixteen in all), and so quickly that she only just got a glimpse of the castle she had seen in the distance, before she found herself riding between the brazen pillars which supported the huge portico of the massive building.

All was at rest and peaceful here, yet Muriel's little heart beat fast with excitement. The tiger halted to shake the dust off his feet.

Suddenly, voices were heard in the distance, singing to a violin accompaniment.

FOLKESTON

"The National Anthem," murmured the tiger, as he saluted solemnly with one paw. Muriel could now clearly distinguish the words—

"Old King Coal is a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul is he—
He called for his pipe, he called for his bowl,
He called for his fiddlers three."

"*And* what else?" exclaimed the tiger.

Then the castle vibrated with the sound of a vast multitude shouting the refrain—

"The tiger! Where is he?"

Thereupon the tiger gave himself a shake, which shook Muriel's wits together, and, with a dignified air, bore her slowly through the state apartments, past rows of bowing attendants, into the magnificent throne-room, with its gleaming walls, upon which were charcoaled the armorial fire-arms in black-tongs luisant, crossed shovel pendant proper on toison d'or.

At the far end of the Grate Hall sat the Fire-King, surrounded by his Court. Muriel recognized him at once by his jolly red face, thick red moustache, beard,

"He helped Muriel to dismount,"

and hair. He was in boisterous spirits, busily doing three things—laughing at a little joke he had just let off, smoking like a furnace, and drinking what looked very much like snapdragon out of a large bowl. Immediately behind him stood his three Court fiddlers, fiddling away for all they were worth—probably a guinea a week, and their coals and gas.

The King had just become aware of the new arrivals, so held up his hand for silence.

Muriel and the tiger bowed low, and the Fire-King, putting aside his pipe, politely raised his crown.

At Muriel's appearance a murmur of admiration went round.

"Sire," said the tiger, "I have brought you a little treasure."

"My tongs!" exclaimed his beaming Majesty. "Really, most charming!" He left his throne, and helped Muriel to dismount, whilst everybody bent low in salutation.

"Welcome, pretty child," said the jolly old King

"What beautiful hair you have! The loveliest maiden-hair! The royal colour, too. Tiger, you shall be well rewarded for this."

"I doubt it," ungraciously murmured the tiger, shrugging his four shoulders.

"You have another stripe of merit."

"I know that, without your telling me," muttered the royal beast.

Muriel was surprised and shocked, but she had to pay attention while the King said: "My dear, I introduce to you my son, Prince Anthracite. Just imagine, he can't smoke, or won't, I don't know which, without being made to!"

A fiery youth, with glowering eyes, red moustache, and short red curls, suddenly stood before her, scowling unamiably. His slight figure was encased in golden armour—a brilliant contrast to the loose yellow garments worn by his jovial parent.

The Prince merely made with his hand a haughty acknowledgment of her pretty curtsey, very different in manner to the merry monarch, whose great

cheeks puffed out with good humour as he said to him—

"Now, Anthy, recite to the lady how the tiger won his stripes."

"I shan't. Do it yourself," replied his dutiful son.

"I fear they trade on the King's good nature," thought Muriel. But he didn't seem to mind the contradiction in the least, and merely replied—

"Certainly. 'If you want a thing well done, always do it yourself,' is my motto; I got it out of my head, but I don't know who put it in." (Applause.) "I'll clear the Court if you make such a noise," he added, looking round with mock vexation.

"The way the tiger won his stripes was by becoming the champion jumper throughout the Iron Boundaries. At every jump he made his mark. He was only an ordinary cat before. Weren't you?"

"Of course, sire, if you say so," came the respectful reply.

"I told you so," said the King triumphantly, and gazed at Muriel so admiringly that she thought it

etiquette to look down and curtsey. Thereupon one half of the Court applauded, whilst the other half called out "Hush!"

"This is General Blazer, chief of the forces. Don't be frightened. Speak to him, my dear."

Muriel plucked up sufficient courage to say rather timidly—

"Are you General Blazer because you wear one?"

"No," replied the warrior curtly; "because I am one still."

"Wear a blazer, do you mean?"

The tiger coughed, and withdrew to a corner.

"*Am.* Don't you know a Blazer when you see one?" And the general turned angrily on both heels.

"Never mind! Never mind him!" laughed the King, seeing her blush and look confused. "He's like the rest of them—he's hot-tempered. Things seem to grate on their nerves. They don't enjoy themselves as they should. Now, I do; but what I enjoy most are love-letters; I can consume any num-

ber of them in no time ; and as to chocolate silver, it simply melts in my mouth."

And he nodded his jolly old head, smacked his smiling lips, and continued the presentations.

"This is Hob-Goblin. He knows every note of music ever sung by a kettle." (He was an ugly little fellow, and looked rusty.) "His only fault is, he hobgobs with the Coals, which is low."

"They won't be for long," retorted Hob-Goblin dismally ; "they're going up every day." (Sensation in Court.)

"I'll clear the Court——"

The King broke off as a strange-looking person came slouching forward. His Majesty quickly whispered to Muriel, who stood staring—

"This is my combination of cousin, scientist, and Lord Chamberlain—Ginger Pop. He goes in for fizzical science. You'll hear him say some wonderful things, if I can get him to."

Muriel curtsied with her head down to hide a smile for Pop was very lanky, with a very big nose, and a

very bald head. His clothes were far too short for him, and his feet were far too large for him, and his neck was far, far too long for him. He was a very queer fellow, with a queer habit of straightening his ginger-coloured whiskers, which the heat always caused to curl.

"Ginger, just fill my pipe, please."

"Oh, no," answered that courtier, bowing low.

"Nor fill my bowl?" asked the King doubtfully.

"No, your Maj.," was the reply, with a still lower bow.

"Nor fetch my string band?" asked the King, sighing deeply.

"Certainly not," was the answer, with a lowest bow.

"I do wish they wouldn't always be going off like that," added the King.

"No wonder he's always asking for them if this is how he doesn't get them," thought Muriel; and feeling vexed at such neglect of the Royal commands, she said: "Sire, allow me to——"

"Never mind," interrupted the King, breaking out into his beaming smile again; "it's quite right. I'm quite accustomed to call for them, but I do get them sometimes, as you saw. You did see me in full state, didn't you?" Muriel nodded.

Thereupon he assured her he already felt just as fatherly towards her as Father Christmas himself, and that was why it was very necessary she should get acquainted with his Court.

"Now, my colossal genius," exclaimed the King, desirous of showing Pop off, and slapping him so heartily on the back that it knocked the gravity out of Muriel's serious face.

"What's the news?"

"Your Maj., five more coalquakes took place near the Boundaries during the afternoon."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the Fire-King helplessly, for firequakes were of daily occurrence.

"That little lot over there," resumed the King, hurriedly changing the subject, "are the elders, or

venerable old coals. They are all embers—M-bers of Parliament."

King Coal laughed with a laugh which sounded like breaking coke. The Court guffawed in unison, for etiquette demanded they should laugh at all the Royal jokes, old and new alike. If they couldn't recognize them, they realized them by the firing.

"They are flushed with pride and importance now," continued the King, "but they'll soon be dust and ashes, poor things. I will not introduce you to the ladies of the Court, my dear, because they are so difficult to catch—they are always playing hide-and-seek."

"Where is Muriel? Wherever is Muriel?" called out a deep, kind, but rather muffled voice, from somewhere aloft. Everybody gazed up. "Why, I've been looking for you everywhere," it added quite loudly. And there, sure enough, feet foremost through a hole in the skylight, dear old Santa Claus came down, scarlet garb, soft white beard, happy smiles and all.

Muriel greeted him with delight, and as he stooped

"'Can you wait, dear Santa Claus?'"

to kiss her she asked eagerly: "Can you wait, dear Santa Claus, or come again later, when I'm ready? I haven't hung my stocking up yet!"

"I'll wait," he answered gently. "His Royalship is speaking to you."

Muriel turned round apologetically.

"Do you play poker?" he was inquiring.

"No, sire."

"You know we always play poker in Fireland; it's our national sport. It is always played with shovel and tongs; they all look in occasionally, to see how I am getting on. It keeps me lively. Are you sure you can't play it?"

"Quite, sire; but I can play 'old maid,'" she rejoined, with proper pride.

"That's not the game I've in my mind for you here," replied the merry monarch. "With your lovely hair, 'old maid' won't do. You must play Princess, and marry my son, the Prince. The wedding festivities are about to begin."

"Marry the Prince? About to begin?" stam-

mered Muriel. "But, sire, why all of a sudden—in such a hurry?"

"On account of the daily firequake," replied his Majesty, "which entirely changes the aspect of domestic affairs all over my dominions. Your knowledge of physical geography is rather shaky, eh, my dear?"

But Muriel felt too shaky herself to think of geography then. She sank on her knees, and was about to beg to play 'old maid' instead, because she didn't like the look of the Fiery Prince, when she saw her friend, the tiger, approaching her with a paw on his lips.

"Clear the hall for the ball!" bawled the Lord Chamberlain, and everybody obeyed, leaving Muriel clinging to the tiger's neck in dismay.

Chapter IV

COALITA

"OH, Ti dear, I don't want to marry the Fiery Prince Anthracite ; I don't like him ; indeed I don't ! "

Muriel wrung her hands in despair, whilst a sympathetic tear from the tiger's right eye rolled slowly down his broad nose.

" Hush ! " he said, again lifting a warning paw to his lips. " His Royal Highness comes this way."

In truth, Prince Anthracite was approaching stealthily, looking anxiously over his shoulder. Then he hurried to every door of the Grate Saloon, peered round impatiently, and finally stood stock-still before Muriel and the tiger. His eyes glowed like two rubies as he turned them on her and said with smouldering passion—

" How dare you come here to spoil my life ? "

Muriel gazed on him in surprise and indignation, which grew greater as he continued—

"How dare you plot to become my wife? How dare you, I say?"

"She didn't," growled the tiger; "it's the King who has fallen in love with her for you."

"Ungrateful creature," began the Prince.

"He isn't; he's a darling!" said Muriel, and hugged him closer.

"Listen to me, both of you," continued the Prince, more excitedly still. "I'll tell you something. It's just this: I'm in love already—do you hear?—in love with beautiful little Coalita. My father knows nothing about it, and nobody dare tell him, because her hair is black, and such a shock would put him out like a match, when they would have to put up with me as their sovereign."

"This is bad news!" groaned the tiger. "If only I had known before! It's a bad business!"

"Therefore," cried Prince Anthracite, glaring fiercely, "you must both be put out of the way!"

"Stood over her little prostrate form."

He clapped his hands, and in rushed a whole regiment of men of the fire brigade, wearing their hose, and blowing their nozzles.

The tiger wasn't going to stand that. With a snarl he sprang to his feet, upsetting Muriel, and stood over her little prostrate form, ready to protect her to the death.

Muriel whispered from underneath him : " The whole lot would only make one mouthful for you, wouldn't they, Ti dear ? "

" Ah ! you forget. They are not made of flesh and blood, but of *fire*," he muttered disconsolately. " It's hopeless, I fear. I am powerless." And sinking his head, he licked the white face of Muriel, who had nearly fainted with fright as he spoke.

" To the caves ! " ordered the Fiery Prince.

A dozen firemen rushed towards Muriel, but stopped at the fierce roar which greeted them. Then the tiger, carefully and gently, picked the little girl up by her sash with his teeth, and swung her tenderly

across his back, where she lay motionless as he carried her under guard in the grim procession.

When Muriel came to herself she was lying down, and the tiger was standing near her.

"Where am I?" she asked.

He told her that they were confined in one of the many caves used as dungeons. She realized that there was no means of escape, for the exits were strongly guarded, and all the fortresses in the kingdom were grouped around the immediate neighbourhood. Their case, it appeared, was hopeless, and they were left to perish as best they could.

"How about dessert?" inquired Muriel.

"Dessert? We are left to die of starvation, according to my deserts, perhaps, but not to yours. I felt sure I shouldn't be rewarded! If only I had known it before! Oh, why did I ever bring this little treasure into Fireland?" He moaned and groaned, and wouldn't listen to her words of comfort.

"Are you hungry?" he asked at last.

Muriel nodded.

"So am I," he added. "I haven't had a meal for ages."

He certainly looked it. His skin hung quite loosely on him, which she hadn't noticed before. Muriel felt a pang of fear. He was quick to notice it.

"I'd rather die a thousand times," he said sadly. "Of course, that's very often; but I'd really rather die over and over again than do you any harm." He yawned, and began to prowl up and down.

"Poor dear Ti," murmured Muriel, as she lay watching her gaunt protector.

Pit-pat, pit-pat, pit-pat.

"What's that?" she said, half rising. The tiger halted and listened.

Pit-pat, pit-pat! It was coming nearer and nearer, and in the opening of the cave there suddenly appeared a handsome little maiden, clothed in light crimson draperies. Her arms and neck were bare, and round them were chains of bright black diamonds. A mass of black hair fell like a mantle

to her bare feet, and her lustrous black eyes wore an anxious look.

"It's Coalita!" guessed Muriel, as she advanced to meet her; and the two little girls gazed in wonder at one another.

"Yes, I am Coalita. Quick! There's very little time. I'm going to save you, Muriel, if at the risk of my life. I'll make a bid for my own happiness at least. I mustn't tell the King where you are, for I love Anthracite. But he hasn't thought that the King will miss you. Don't interrupt—listen."

She talked quickly, with agitation, as though she had been running fast.

"This is my plan. You must be at the festivities, and, during them, I must trust to an opportunity of taking your place, when I will pretend to be you, and keep it up until you've had time to escape from this country, to which you ought never to have come. But how can we manage that? How can I look like you? Our height is about the same, but you are so different. Think, quick!"

Muriel tried as hard as she could.

The tiger lay still, full of anxiety for his little friend, and full of hunger, which was gnawing at his chest.

"I think I have it," said Muriel. "The King specially drew attention to the colour of my hair. Could you cut yours to my length, and dye it to my colour? Perhaps the scientist knows how to dye —once!"

"That will do!" cried Coalita. "I think I can manage it easily now, if only we are lucky, and if we are not too late. Come! No," she added, as Muriel beckoned to the tiger, "I can't get *him* out —only you. The only secret opening of which I know is far too small for him."

"I can't leave him here to die alone," cried Muriel. "I won't. Not for anything in the world." For Coalita was drawing her away.

"Don't wait," urged the dark little maiden. "If you come at once, everything will go well. When I have explained to Anthracite, he will be so pleased at

the thought of our marriage that he will set the tiger free so as to help you to escape all the quicker. Your separation won't be for long. So come! Quick!"

Muriel hurriedly embraced her faithful tiger, and the two girls ran out of the cave.

The tiger saw his fair-haired charge turn to wave him adieu. He wondered if he should ever see gentle Muriel again, and with a feeling of gratitude for her safety he fell fast asleep.

Chapter V

PRINCE ANTHRACITE'S WEDDING

"GO in there," said Coalita, giving Muriel a little push of encouragement; "go into the Grate Hall."

But Muriel stood shyly on the threshold, amazed at the sight of the gorgeous assembly and so many lights, and felt too confused to move.

"The Princess!" they shouted, and all made obeisance, while Muriel had just sufficient presence of mind to make her best curtsey. When she looked around, she found everybody and everything in gala trim, and was glad not to see Prince Anthracite there.

"My son will be here soon," explained the Fire-King, as he led her to a throne next to his, made of

pure gold set with blue lights. "He is head of the Board of Fireworks, you know, and has to let off squibs for the holiday."

His jovial face was beaming.

"I do enjoy a wedding, don't you, my dear?"

"It depends on whose it is," replied poor Muriel.

Every one was talking and arguing, and the fiddlers were fiddling away for dear life, although King Coal told Muriel, in confidence, that they were really not worth the price of their rosin.

General Blazer, Ginger-Pop, and Hob-Goblin were wrangling hard in a far corner. They had flared up in consequence of a draught, and they feared it had a black look-out.

The King beckoned to them by holding up three fingers. So they came forward in single file, bowing and scraping (like the fiddlers) at odd times as they advanced, and getting bumped and butted back and front—a most undignified procession. He and Muriel laughed heartily, but the company were too fiery tempered to see humour in anything.

The King looked at his pocket thermometer, shouted "Time!" and the ball began at once.

Muriel danced with his merry old soulship. The Court divided itself into waltzing couples, whilst the gay young sparks, flirting with their old flames, gracefully darted to and fro, jumped and twisted, roared and simpered, frolicked and gambolled, cutting the most amazing figures in their jollity.

As Muriel was being whizzed round and round in the arms of the jovial old King, she caught a glimpse, through an archway, of Prince Anthracite, sitting in a corner talking earnestly with the handsome Coalita.

When every one was breathless, Pop fired a toy gun, which had been named after him as it was his own invention.

At this signal everybody sat down to await the royal wedding ceremony. All except Muriel, for Prince Anthracite now came in and led her away, in order to make their formal entry.

Muriel felt heavy at heart, for her companion was

silent, and no further news of how to escape had reached her.

Excitement rose higher and higher, and in exactly seven degrees of time by the King's thermometer, which he had kept in his mouth, the violinists struck up the National Anthem, and in walked Prince Anthracite, dressed in grey velvet, leading his bride in her white frock, and enveloped in the scarlet wedding veil.

The royal wedding ceremony was very simple—merely the exchange of flashy-looking ruby rings, which had been handed down from time immemorial.

The assembly knelt in silence whilst the rings were duly exchanged, and then every one lay low, in fear and awe of the philosophical address to be delivered by the Lord Chamberlain. King Coal alone sat smiling on his throne, with the bridal pair divided on each side of him.

Ginger-Pop mounted a high pedestal in the middle of the hall, and tried hard to look like Shakespeare.

"The banquet's getting cold!" called out the Fiery Prince. "Hurry up!"

"Betrothed Couple, Coalship, and Court! Resignation, on which you must lean, now that you are married, does not subsist on the fat of the land. That all goes in the day. Everything goes in the day. To-morrow all will be different."

The King shouted, "Chorus!"

And the multitude responded, "Hear, hear!"

Ginger-Pop continued all in a breath—

"Remember! He who fights and runs away, will live to run away another day."

Then the whole assembly clapped their hands, and the King nodded approval.

"Stupendous genius!" said he.

And then, according to ancient lights, the scarlet wedding veil was removed from off the bride's head, and all the company filed into the Grate Bar, where a long table was spread with smoked meats and red mulled wines. The Royalties sat at the head, and the rest sat where they could.

They feasted and drank. The fun waxed hot and was at its height, when the King, beaming on the bride, tenderly stroked the auburn locks he admired so much.

Chapter VI

THE CAST OF THE DYE

ALL of a sudden, the Fire-King stopped aghast and looked at his hand. Every one gazed in open-mouthed astonishment, with dainty morsels poised on their upraised forks.

The golden auburn colour was coming off.

Then a great shout went round the table, "It's Coalita!"

Coalita it was! Everybody sat stock-still with surprise, and Prince Anthracite looked anxiously at his father.

King Coal called for his pipe,
He called for his bowl—

which a page, dressed in black and grey writing, quickly brought. But, for the first time on record, King

Coal did *not* call for his "fiddlers three," which discomfited them considerably, as their violins were all ready to play out of tune. It was evident he was very sad. No one dared stir, for they noticed the dark shadow which was overspreading the merry face of the Fire-King.

He took a deep draught, and puffed hard at his pipe, but it wouldn't draw. At this he began to change colour. He turned as grey as the Prince's doublet, and as hoary as Santa Claus, who sat near him. He was clearly now in deep dudgeon.

Something was going to happen; everybody felt it coming.

Suddenly there was a momentary flicker in the Fire-King's dim eyes, which caused them to glow like live coals. He fired up slightly, and turning to the Prince he said gloomily—

"You're bringing my ashes with sorrow to the bin!"

The guests buried their faces in their hands and shivered.

"Pardon us, Father," begged Prince Anthracite humbly.

There seemed also a change in him. He looked pale—though not in a white heat—and his voice had become soft and gentle.

"I'm low and depressed," gasped the aged Fire-King. "I feel chilly—I'm choking for want of air—I feel I must—*go out!*"

He staggered towards the door, followed by all. But before he could go out, he was stopped by the entry of a number of little black slaves, who distracted his attention by their queer antics, and brought again the flickering smile to his face.

"Muriel! Muriel!" he now called plaintively. "I'm sure she has gone away. I must go after her; I don't want her to go."

"You want her to come back, don't you?" said Santa Claus affectionately.

"Yes, yes."

"But, Fireship, how can she come back unless she goes?" volunteered his old friend Derby Bright.

"Tell me, Pop," began the King.

The Lord Chamberlain mopped his bald head, took a long pull at his whiskers, and replied—

"By coming backwards, of course."

"Of course," replied his sovereign.

Santa Claus rose to go.

"Adieu, Fire-King," he said, shaking him warmly by the hand. "A new light is dawning for you. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Era to you!"

As he went out and shut the door, cheers and laughter seemed to come in, wafted on the draught.

"Forgive us, dear Father," wistfully begged Coalita, with a winning smile.

At first the Fire-King made no reply, but then he opened his arms and clasped the happy pair to his breast.

Then Coalita looked over his shoulder, and waved a farewell to some one unseen.

Chapter VII

A HAIRBREADTH ESCAPE: SHOWING WHAT BREADTH OF HAIR THE ESCAPE WAS

NOW Coalita, according to her plan, had met Prince Anthracite and Muriel—to the latter's delight—as they were about to re-enter the Grate Hall in bridal array. She also was dressed in white, and, taking the scarlet wedding veil from Muriel, she wrapped herself in it instead.

"You fed the poor tiger, as you promised?" were Muriel's first anxious words.

"Yes, and my Prince has told him the password."

Then Coalita quickly gave her the final directions, kissed her, and wished her a safe journey; the Prince drew his bride's arm lovingly through his, and they passed on to the ceremony.

Hiding all the time, as she had been told to do, in the shadow of one of the numerous arches, Muriel had followed all the proceedings, first amused, then frightened, longing only for the sign which Coalita was to give when a safe moment for escape had arrived.

So, when at last Coalita looked her way and waved her farewell, Muriel hurried off as fast as her feet could take her, through the lofty passages by the way she had come ; but this time she felt very small and very lonely. Arrived at the brazen pillars, she waited behind the right one as arranged.

No one was about ; everybody had disappeared. There was a perfect silence.

Then a heavy tread came her way. Muriel peeped furtively round the corner. It was only Santa Claus. He saw her, smiled kindly and nodded, and said—

"I did wait, but I'll come again later, when you're ready. I know you've not hung your stocking up yet."

"They sped through the streets like lightning."

As he passed on, Muriel blew him a kiss, which he caught and put in his bag with a laugh.

At last, dear old Ti came bounding towards her, still rather thin, but joyous and full of animal spirits.

"Houpla!" was all he remarked, and in a second Muriel houpla'd on to his back, and they were off.

After awhile he panted out—

"Lie full length, and clasp me round the neck. We must go still faster; there isn't a moment to lose. We *must get away* before the evening newspaper *comes in!*"

Muriel never waited to ask for explanations, but did as she was told, and they sped through the streets like lightning.

Her hair had escaped from the ribbon which held it, and spread out behind her at least a yard in breadth.

After a long time the tiger said: "Would you like to know some news before it is news?"

"Yes," she replied, with eager curiosity. "*I* never heard any that wasn't before."

"I believe you," remarked the tiger, finding time enough to give his knowing wink.

"The King has completely forgiven the young couple. He is beginning to look his merry old self again. He sends you his love, and has expressed his regret that you've an appointment elsewhere."

"Can't I go back?" begged Muriel, suddenly remembering her manners. "I haven't said 'thank you.'"

"No, you can't," replied the tiger. "It would make us late for dessert."

They were fast nearing the boundaries. Muriel felt much fresher than on her previous ride, but this time it seemed to have told more on the tiger. He had become so thin and broad with all the exercise that even his bones felt worn out beneath her light weight, and it seemed to her as though nothing much were left of him but skin and head.

Distant sounds as of firing were heard.

"Are we being pursued, Ti dear?" she inquired in a frightened voice.

"We have been," he replied, grinning and showing all his teeth. And panted out, "A hot pursuit—at least 200 degrees Centigrade in the shade."

As he spoke, a distant echo resounded of—

"Special edition! Great earthquake! Extra special! Grate fire—Earthquake!!"

Then came a great jump. And Muriel knew the evening news was in, and felt that she was safe back again.

Crack—crackle—*crash!—BANG!!*

Chapter VIII

BACK AGAIN

"DESSERT is on the table, if you please, Miss Muriel!"

The little lady found herself lying full length on the soft tiger-skin, with both her arms clasped tightly round its head.

Outside, they were shouting the evening papers: "Special edition! Great fire! Terrible earthquake!"

She looked dreamily at the huge fire, which had just been relighted. The newspaper, dry wood, and coals were being rapidly burnt up, crackling, banging away, all fuss and brightness.

"Dessert is on the table, if you please, Miss Muriel!" repeated the butler.

"Thank you, Rawlinson, I'm coming," she replied mechanically, as she got up from the hearth-rug.

Then Muriel retied the bow in her hair, which had come undone, smoothed out her white silk frock, and walked demurely downstairs.

The Magic Garret

LENA went to the door of the old cottage to see if her father were coming home. He was a scene-shifter at the theatre in the small town and usually was late, but he had never been so late as this before. The long moonlit road was empty, and looked so dreary and lonely that Lena re-entered the kitchen, and for about the dozenth time she readjusted his chair.

Then she ran up the few crazy stairs to her little garret where hung a piece of broken mirror which she consulted once again to see if she were tidy. Perhaps she did look a trifle pale and tired; if her father saw that, she thought, he would get anxious and not allow her to sit up to look after him, as he had often threatened. So she set to work with a scrubby towel, and her face was soon glowing and rosy.

In spite of her shabby frock, with her brightened cheeks and graceful little figure, she looked a girl who was only pretending to be poor and humble, and that she was in those surroundings because she preferred them. Indeed, she was very cheerful in them, although she was only a poor scene-shifter's daughter. He seemed to love her more than ever since her mother had died, and they were very happy together.

As long as she could remember she had always been alone in this dear old garret which she loved, with its tiny square of window through which the moon peeped in. There was a bit of carpet, with its pattern of tulips never clearly recognizable for being so worn ; and damp-stained walls to which in parts still clung remnants of wall-paper decorated with long-faded forget-me-nots ; the small wooden pallet-bed matched the rest of the scanty, broken furniture. But she loved it all, and took pride in it.

" Lena ! " called her father softly. Surprised at not having heard him come in, she ran down and there was lots of love in their embrace.

"No, dear, I'm not hungry," he replied, seating himself and pushing away the food which she wanted him to take. "Go to bed, my child. It's so late, I'd hoped you wouldn't wait up."

Lena looked at him. He was always so cheery, but to-night he was low-spirited, it seemed to her, and much older. She thought he might be ill. She put her arm round his neck as he sat gazing into the almost burnt-out fire, and stroked his red hands.

"What is it, father? Is it that your joints hurt you worse to-night? What's the trouble?"

He didn't answer at first. She waited. Then she coaxed him till he told her that there had been talk at the theatre of his being sent away. The manager was a bully. "I up'd and told him I wouldn't be row'd for what I hadn't done," explained the scene-shifter indignantly. "'Blame those who deserve it,' I said. But that only made it worse."

Lena tried to comfort him; but the silence which ensued was broken only by the worn ticking of the old clock. Of course, dismissal from the small suburban

theatre meant their leaving the old home to find a post, if they were lucky, in one of the city theatres. And if they weren't lucky ?

" If I'm discharged it's ruin," muttered her father, following his train of thought.

The old clock took it up. " Ru–in ! ru–in ! " it ticked, so many times that Lena at last took her apron from her eyes and looked at it in wonder. Then she saw that her father had fallen asleep. She watched him for a moment, then crept noiselessly back to her garret which she had left so gaily it now seemed ever so long ago. There, she hoped to find what she always had found in it, courage and fresh hope.

As she undressed, her mind dwelt still on the theatre, where she had been but once, when she was quite a little thing. She had a seat somewhere high up, and had seen the beautiful fairyland which to this day she pretended to believe was the real fairyland she had heard of. And she could never bear to hear her father refer to that lovely being, the Fairy Queen, as Miss Giggs—it always sounded wrong.

She got into bed, but to-night she couldn't sleep; and soon her pillow was wet with tears.

A gentle voice said—

"Don't cry, Lena!"

She lifted her head and saw standing beside her the beautiful Fairy she had seen from a distance on that memorable night at the theatre.

"Oh, Miss!" exclaimed Lena in surprise, sitting up and clasping her hands. "Have you come with good news for father? He didn't mean any harm."

"I know that," said the beautiful Fairy.

"Lady, who are you?" asked Lena in an awed voice. "Is it really you I saw years ago?"

"Lena," answered the musical voice—the eyes of the Fairy were shining strangely—"I am the Flower Fairy. Your tears have brought me. This is a Magic Garret, where some of my children have always watched over you and guarded you. You have never been sad up here before."

"No, no," stammered Lena in her surprise, "that's quite true—always happy up here."

·THE·FLOWER·FAIRY·IN·THE·MAGIC·GARRET·

"There is trouble coming—a trial for both of us; but I have the power to help you if you will obey me."

"What am I to do?"

"Henceforward, when the moon is shining, some of my children here shall spring into life so that you may see them, and seeing them, you shall know that I am befriending you and yours. But"—here she raised her silver wand, just like a pantomime fairy—"above all things be careful you do not harm them, for withered flowers are withered joys. Remember that. And remember, too, that they are my children and precious to me, every one. Good-bye!"

"Miss Fairy, don't go—there's several things I—tell me, please——"

But the door flew open, then shut, and the lovely visitor had gone.

Lena realized that the moon was shining, shining straight through the little high window. It lighted up the shabby old walls, and, wonder of wonders! it showed them festooned with the sweetest real forget-me-nots, while the old carpet was no longer faded

and worn, but was of the softest velvety turf with beautiful tulips growing up out of it! And, what she had never known before, through the broken rafters of the roof the stars could be seen winking and blinking in a queer way, as though they, too, must have a peep and were looking down upon something very strange.

Lena lay there, too astonished to move, wrapped in a delicious sensation of peacefulness, and marvelling that magic flowers should have been there all the time and she never knew it!

"Come in!" she cried, conscious of a tap at the door.

Her father entered. Then stopped, staring hard all round about him.

"Hullo! I say! Whatever are you a-growing up here, Lena? It's like a blooming arbour!" he said, looking blankly at her. "Who gave them to you? Did she?" and he jerked his thumb in the direction of the passage.

Lena raised herself up and nodded her head quickly, smiling with great importance.

"Met her on the stairs. Why, I couldn't believe my senses," continued her father volubly, his eyes roving round the walls and floor. "At first I thought it was our Miss Giggs come to ask about that bracelet of hers I've been and forgot to take to be mended. But when I looked closer—I never see any one half so beautiful, and with them shining eyes, too. As I was a-saying, when I looked closer, why, she vanished into air before me! I tell you, it gave me quite a turn—so I came to see if you are all right. Whoever can she be?"

"She is the *Flower Fairy*, father—and looks the same real live fairy I've seen before. And she did all these beautiful flowers with her wand—the same wand, father. And I've only got to take care of them for all to go well with us. That's what she said."

After she had told him all about it, "Rather rummy, ain't it?" he remarked, half puzzled, half suspicious. "Well, I take it very kind of her," he added, smiling. "But we'd better keep

the matter very secret, for I couldn't account for it much, you know, if people got wind of it."

Then he kissed her, and, scratching his head and looking very perplexed, he walked slowly to his room.

* * * * *

The next morning when Lena awoke, she rubbed her eyes and wondered if she were still dreaming, or had dreamt, or had not dreamt at all. She knew that when you meet fairies and they are kind to you, it always seems to turn out a dream. She sometimes doubted even Santa Claus, and suspected that real live people put things into stockings—which, of course, is absurd. Her garret was exactly as it always had been—nothing but faded worn-out ghosts of tulips on the ragged carpet ; nothing but the faintest reminder of forget-me-nots on the tattered paper upon the walls.

She dressed quickly and ran to her father. He was looking bright in spite of the terrible dismissal which hung over him. "It must be all right," she said to herself.

"Father, I didn't *dream* about the Fairy, did I?" she asked aloud, anxiously. "You saw it all, didn't you?"

"Of course, I saw it all right enough, and the lady, too," he replied. "No, you ain't been a-dreaming, my dear. You're forgetting it's the sun what's shining now, and not the moon! So they can't be a-blooming, see?"

That evening the scene-shifter came home radiant.

"The guv'nor ain't half a bad sort, after all," he remarked, after greeting his little daughter. "Not only he said nothing more about that there little matter, but he's been and raised me handsome, my dear, as might be he was sorry."

Lena clapped her hands; whereupon, he drew from his great pockets mysterious parcels, which turned out to be very good things for supper, including a bottle of wine not of a gooseberry brand. Lena tasted it, and the two ate heartily and were very merry.

"Things are certainly looking up!" he remarked later as he pulled contentedly at the pipe Lena had

lighted for him. And then his old chair was wheeled closer to the window so that they might peer out into the dark night whilst they waited, and wondered if the moon would appear.

The moon beamed forth from the dark vault above in the fulness of her majesty. Lena and her father hurried to the door, tumbled up the few stairs in their excitement, and—there, sure enough, there in the Magic Garret, flooded with white light, bloomed the stately tulips and the sweet forget-me-nots!

Full of gratitude and wonder, Lena flung her arms around her father.

"It's all true," they said. "It's all right. Good-night, dear. Good-night!"

Thenceforward things prospered with them. Lena began to show her talent for embroidering fine linen, and that was soon well paid for. She was so industrious, too, and so lucky in obtaining work, that before very long little luxuries and bigger luxuries began to come into the tumbledown old cottage. Not quite so tumbledown neither as of yore, with its new out-

door coat of paint, the mended porch, and its generally spruce appearance.

"My!" observed her father simply. "Isn't it grand to be landed gentry!"

So whenever the moon shone there came the magic flowers, bright omens of happiness and prosperity. The neighbours wondered and were pleased, for people loved the gentle Lena and respected her father too. Little gifts came their way, too, from the old cottage, and brightened their sombre lives.

Now, it was dusk on the last day of May. Lena sat at the open window of the kitchen, sewing by the lingering light, when she heard a child's sobs. Leaning out she saw a strange little boy, crying pitifully. He told her that he lived some distance away. His mother was lying ill and he was so wretched because he had promised to buy her some flowers for when she awoke next morning, and he had lost his money through a hole in his jacket.

Lena, believing every word, called him to come closer, and put money in his hand; but he refused it,

thanking her and explaining it was no use to him, for it was too late now to buy. No one hereabouts had flowers to sell—and he gulped down a big sob as he said that he was so tired.

"Could I give him some of mine?" thought Lena. "Would the Fairy mind if it is for a charity?" She looked anxiously towards the sky at some storm clouds which were appearing in the distance; overhead was all blue and serene, the storm might not come this way—surely it would be a glorious moonlight night, and the nightingale was trilling already.

"Come at daydawn to-morrow," she said. "Knock, and I will—I will give you a few of my flowers; I haven't got any now. But I shall have some."

His pale face flushed, and his eyes sparkled, and he was gone so quickly that the earth seemed to have swallowed him up. Lena could not tell in which direction he went, which was the more surprising as her gaze had been fastened upon him.

As night came on the clouds rolled heavily forward, and it became so dark that she feared there would be

no moon, no flowers, no joy, for the boy and his mother. Then she forgot all about the matter as she tended her father when he returned, and listened to a great scheme for a first little investment of his wages.

Only when Lena was fast asleep the dark cloud-wrack parted, the bright moonlight appeared through the rift streaming into the Magic Garret, and kissed her awake.

There were the lovely flowers all around with their message of comfort. The stars, too, were twinkling in their surprised way, playing peep through the holes in the rafters.

She remembered her promise to the lad, and she rose and gathered a small bunch of tulips and forget-me-nots, and she placed them tenderly in her ewer of water. Then she fell into a deep sleep.

It was late—long past her usual hour—when she awoke, and her head felt queer and heavy as from some bad dream. And the rain was dripping, dripping

in upon her from above. "That," she said to herself, "has never happened before."

Lena noticed that her water-jug was not in its usual place. Remembering that she had put it on the mantelshelf with the flowers in it, she jumped up, took the jug to the light and looked in. Floating on the water she found only a bit of faded coloured paper, and there was a sodden piece of worsted which had sunk to the bottom. She glanced at the carpet—a big hole was there where she had plucked the tulips. Her eyes fastened anxiously on one part of the wall —an ugly black patch was there where she had gathered the forget-me-nots. The jug fell from her trembling hands and broke to atoms.

"Why, of course," she suddenly cried, "the moon isn't shining now. I oughtn't to have got scared!" Then she thought that the lad could not have come, or his knock must have roused her. And his not coming caused her a feeling of misgiving.

When she went down to the kitchen to find her father the old clock seemed to point reproachfully

to the lateness of the hour and, to her fancy, it was ticking that dreadful old refrain of "Ru-in, ru-in!" She found that for the first time her father had already gone to his work—and without his breakfast.

Tears rose to her eyes. The rain blurred the lattice, pattering with a mournful sound, and Lena felt a miserable sensation of loneliness. The clock ticked on until, unable to bear it any longer, she threw a cloth over it to get it out of sight and hearing.

The day dragged on as though it were a week. No neighbour looked in as usual to have a little cheerful gossip. Too restless to work, Lena sat there dejected, longing for her father's return. Yet, she had only just lighted the candle and begun to set the supper when she was startled by sounds of angry voices outside, and was frightened when her father rushed into the kitchen, double-bolted the door, and in hurried, agitated tones bade her lock herself in her garret and let no one enter.

"Never mind why," he said, posting himself before

the open window. "Go quickly. The moon may come out at any moment."

His manner terrified her into quick obedience, and she did as she was bid, wondering what could have happened. The rain had stopped, and in her garret, which was now quite dark, her heart beat painfully as she stood rooted to the spot and listened to a strange man's angry voice. Instinct told her it belonged to the dreaded manager.

"Let me in! I mean to see this matter through," he shouted in a towering rage from outside. "Don't you tell me you gave the bracelet back. Miss Giggs says she's not set eyes on it since you promised to take it to be mended. Let me in, do you hear?"

There arose the murmur of many voices, men's and women's.

"Ask the shopman, sir," cried her father from the kitchen, trying to keep respectful. "He'll tell you he did mend it. It's true that I forgot it for a couple of days."

"Ah! Forgot it, did you? Sounds funny, don't it?"

"But the next morning I took it to the shop, and as soon as it was mended I called for it and I took it back to the theatre and left the parcel for Miss Giggs. Even if it's got mislaid, it's only a trumpery thing, and I'll get her another for a few shillings. It's my fault, I know."

"You seem pretty glib with your shillings, my man, and with your tongue," sneered the manager; "but not shillings but pounds, and a great many of them wouldn't buy it. You know very well it's a valuable thing and no prop. bracelet."

"What on earth do you mean, sir?"

"Mean? I mean you've been and sold it, or you've got it here; and other things, too, I shouldn't wonder, by the free way you've been spending money of late. Here, open the door. Why don't you let me in?"

"I won't let you in. I won't have you about my place. You've got the truth and that's all about it."

"All about it, is it? You're afraid of being found out—that's about the size of it. Why, man, you look

like a thief in the moonlight. You'll hear more of this, my fine fellow, I promise you ! "

Growling out threats, which were received with applause by the neighbours—(" Oh, those neighbours," thought Lena, with a lump in her throat, " and we've been so kind to them ! ")—he moved off. His heavy footsteps died away, followed by those of his hearers who had stood near listening with grim approval. Then all was quiet again.

Indeed, the moon had stolen through the wildly-drifting clouds and shone not only upon the poor scene-shifter's white face but straight down upon Lena as she stood there—as she stood there transfixed with fear and apprehension. Then she flew out of the room and into the kitchen where her father sat in deep dejection. Throwing herself into his arms she sobbed out—

" Oh, father, the flowers are blooming no more ! "

He listened with a haggard face to her tale. Then he stroked her hair. " You wanted to do a kind action, dearie," he said sadly. " I should as like as

not have done the same myself, thinking maybe the Flower Lady wouldn't mind it. But it seems to have brought trouble on us, lass. She must have noticed it somehow! You know, she said as they were her children!"

* * * * *

That night Lena's pillow again was wet with tears, and again she felt a presence there. A cool hand was on her forehead, and she was conscious of the Flower Fairy bending over her in the darkness. She recognized the soft voice which said, oh, so sorrowfully—

"Lena, you have disobeyed. I tested you—I had to test you—and found you wanting. To please yourself in doing good with giving what belonged to another, you have plucked some of my children from my breast. How shall I account for your disobedience? It may be long before the Fairy Queen of Earth will bid the dead blossoms rise again and bloom afresh!"

"Fairy," sobbed Lena, "I will never again——"

"'Tis of no use to cry, Lena. Earn forgiveness."

The child flung out her arms in supplication.

But she was alone in the Magic Garret where the beautiful Spell had been broken.

And the poor scene-shifter, tossing on his couch, seemed to hear the echo of the words, "Oh, father, the flowers are blooming no more!"

* * * * *

In the grey dawn both were up. Lena knew that her father was accused of being a common thief, and that, as the chatter spread, the neighbours had looked coldly on him, avoided him, seeming to believe it.

"Let's go from here, father," she begged. "They'll come and take you from me. The Fairy warned me last night that we must earn forgiveness. We can't here. Oh, father, let us get away quickly and go a long way off."

"Why, Lena, what a little woman you are! After all, I'd as lief be anywhere as here. I'd stop and face it, but," he added, dropping his voice, "what can you do when your own Fairy is against you, too!

Besides, they seem to be making a regular dead set at me."

And so, before the first lights of the rising sun began to gleam, the two had fled. Everything they left behind them in their hurry, even their savings in their safe hole under the kitchen floor.

Lena locked the door and her heart was heavy. Her father was silent, fretting over the insult to his honesty. At first they hurried along furtively, though nobody else was yet astir. Then they trudged more slowly and wearily under the hot June sun, along the dusty roads which led to the distant city; and there in the crowded streets they hoped to become lost to such as might pursue them.

It was sultry that evening in the city. The foot-sore travellers were bewildered at the noise and bustle, and got so hustled and abused for getting in people's way that they gladly turned at last into a quiet alley where a lodging, so called, was found. It consisted of a couple of cellars, damp and uncomfortable—still it was a shelter.

When Lena came back with food she had purchased, she found that her father could eat none of it. He was ill, hot and shivering. Lena watched by his bedside. The next day he was too weak to rise.

"Go to the big theatre, and seek work for me there, Lena," he said. "I shall be better to-morrow." So she went, but there was no vacancy for him.

And day after day she went on similar missions equally fruitless, for she had no reference or testimonial to show from the many years' place she spoke of.

All that time he lay there, whilst their slender means dwindled and dwindled till they were threatened to be turned out, as no money was left to pay for rent. Lena was brave, but no kind Fairy came there to comfort her. If only she would come to-night, sighed Lena, gulping down her tears, and help or talk to her! To-morrow they would be adrift again, without a penny, and there was her father weak and ill with sadly aching joints.

The morrow dawned and with it no comfort came. Lena obtained some needlework to do; but the pay-

ment was wickedly low. By stitching very, very hard she would be just able to keep a roof over their heads and starvation from the door. As her father said in admiration—"There's no other child like you, my dear, outside of a story-book!"

* * * * *

As soon as he grew strong enough, he determined to start at once for a village not far off where he hoped to get work in the fields.

"It's my turn now again, little woman!" he said. An hour later they were once more on the road—this time through the sweetest of country lanes.

"The air is full of Spring, Lena," exclaimed her father, as he breathed it in and inhaled health and strength as he went.

They seated themselves to rest on the grass beside a brook; Lena held his big hand in hers. "Look!" he exclaimed, disengaging it and pointing to a blue veronica on the bank; "bring it here, my dear, and let me smell the scent of it."

"No, no!" she cried quickly, grasping his hand

and holding it tight. "Don't pluck it: it's the Flower Fairy's own beautiful Veronica," she said, and there was a wondering sadness in her words.

"Ah!" he observed. "that was thoughtless of me, wasn't it? I'm a beauty, I am! It would only have withered and would have been there no longer to tell us it is Spring."

They were startled as they looked to find that the little bank before them, where one blue veronica had been growing, was covered all over with the flowers, and in their midst stood the Fairy—the Fairy stood there among them, in the full sunlight, before them! She smiled as she said—

"I have come to you again."

Lena and her father uttered no sound.

"Why," she continued, "why did you *run away*?" Her emphasis was not flattering.

"If you please, ma'am—miss," broke in the scene-shifter, "I couldn't explain—they wouldn't have believed me—that—your ladyship——"

The Fairy raised her wand and said—

"Go back! For shame."

"But they'll put the police on me in a minute."

"Go back. If you cannot clear yourself, face what may await you."

"If only I could share it," pleaded Lena.

"I'd take it very kind if you'd tell me how I——"

But only the solitary little blue veronica was there again before them.

Father and daughter looked at one another.

"Lena, my dear," said her father, rising to his feet, "that's right. And I forgot it. I've been a fool. Likewise a coward. I'm a-going to brave the matter out. I ought to have done it from the first. It'll be harder now. Quick march—if you are not too tired."

Lena didn't quite feel like quick-marching, but she walked with her hand in his, towards the town, homewards—away from the singing of the larks, the scent of the briar, and the freedom of the fields: homewards, to the evil gossip of the neighbours and into the shadow of trouble.

* * * * *

They entered the kitchen of their old home, but, tired though they were, they did not think of resting, Lena noticed too many cobwebs about for that, and her father, having removed the traces of the long march, kissed her and hurried off to the theatre.

Lena ran up to her garret and opened the creaking door. It was just the same as she had left it—except that the hole in the carpet was no longer to be seen, and the black stain on the wall had disappeared.

* * * * *

"Oh, there you are," said the manager. "At last! Glad to see you. We've hunted for you everywhere."

"Glad? What for?" replied the scene-shifter. "I tell you again what I told you before—the accusation's false. I've done nothing to be ashamed of—except not facing it out—but I'd a reason——"

"Stop a minute," broke in the manager.

"If you'd only believe it, sir——"

"I do."

"I mean, that I'm innocent."

"I know."

"Know what?"

"D'you think that I'd have troubled to search for you if I hadn't?"

"I hope, sir," said the man in a faltering voice. "I hope you're not having a game with me."

The manager smiled as he raised his hand—a comforting sort of hand. "Everything's all right. There, there, my man, keep quiet, do. Sit down. There's good news. The bracelet was found. We are all very sorry, *I'm* very sorry—let me make it right. And accept this little collection we've made as a peace-offering. I knew you'd come back; I always said so." Whereupon the manager shook the scene-shifter by the hand, and slapped him on the shoulder, and assured him, with much emphasis, that *he* was all right and quite a decent chap, taking him all round. *Quite* a decent chap.

That evening the neighbours, whom their old friend was only too happy to forgive, clubbed together and spread a surprise feast in the jolly little kitchen, that

wasn't big enough to hold them all. So an overflow meeting picnicked upon the stairs. And the room where kind words and kindly actions had always been, laughter and good fellowship filled once more. And when the play was over, the manager and Miss Giggs called in to welcome Lena and to drown the past in present congratulation. As they crossed the threshold, Lena saw they were not alone, for at that instant—and for an instant only—the Flower Fairy stood by them. and waved her wand as in farewell, as she slowly disappeared.

"However could I have imagined Miss Giggs to be a real Fairy!" thought Lena as that lady in hat and cloak stooped and kissed her.

When darkness set in and her father was standing in the road bidding the last guests good-night, Lena, who had watched the dusk gathering slowly, was free to steal unnoticed to her dear old garret.

She entered and uttered an exclamation of delight. The moon was looking in in her old cheery way, and the Magic Garret was bright with glorious silver light

—with its carpet of growing tulips, with its walls garlanded with forget-me-nots. The little stars were twinkling, too, and winking, to show that they had known all about it all along.

"Look, father, look!" cried Lena joyously, leading him in. "The flowers are blooming again! The dear flowers are blooming again!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" he replied. "And to think that if I told the whole story to people grown-up or little ones, I'll be bound there would be some of them that wouldn't believe it!"

THE END.

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